

FRESH WIND
BLOWING



BOOKS BY GRACE CAMPBELL

THORN-APPLE TREE

THE HIGHER HILL

FRESH WIND BLOWING

by Grace Campbell



COLLINS

70 Bond Street, Toronto



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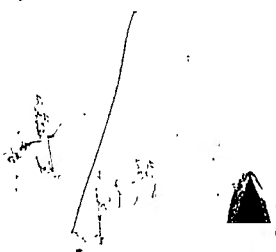
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FOR HARVEY





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Part One

KIRK AND KARI





Chapter I

CARRICKFERGUS

THE valley of the Qu'Appelle sweeps in great swinging curves across the western plains. Midway from its rise to its junction with the Assiniboine, the river bends sharply back on itself, and a headland juts out from its southern bank. Trees, scrub-oak and white birch and choke-cherry, hedge in the little plateau. From here, one may look far up the valley to the west, and down the valley to the east, and along the sharp-edged, high northern rim of it, and be oneself securely hid from view.

Here, in times past, Indian scouts watched for buffalo herds or for enemy horsemen. From here, the early settlers surveyed the land, appraising it. Here, on a bright September afternoon, Kirk and Kari Andreson sat their piebald ponies and gazed out over the sun-drenched valley.

They were twins, and looked it. An Irish mother and a Scandinavian father had lent varying ancestral strains. Their fair hair and their straight slim bodies spoke of Norway, but their eyes were as dark blue and

black-lashed and deep-set as any in County Antrim or Donegal. They were eighteen, and so alike that looking at one was the same as looking at the other. Hair, eyes, skin-colouring, bone-structure, all the same. With, of course, the difference of sex, that made Kirk's shoulders a little squarer, his legs quite a bit longer, and the contours of his face more bold.

This idle Sunday afternoon they had spent riding the valley trails, skirting the swelling ramparts of the northern slope, bare of trees but rich with bracken and wolf-willow and pale prairie grass, and splashing through the curving, shallow river in the flats; then, turning their ponies homeward, they climbed the wooded terraces of the south bank and came out on this small plateau, which had been since childhood their own particular, well-loved place.

The birch trees shaded it. The choke-cherries and the saskatoons and the thorny wild-rose bushes enclosed it. The grass grew short and thick here, the wind sifted through, and the place was sweet with the clean smell of the undisturbed good earth. Here Kari always felt a peculiar sense of peace and intimacy, a sense of belonging and of quiet. She felt it now.

Then a sound broke the stillness. A sound from the sky. A giant humming. A plane swooped down over the rim of the valley, the sun glinting on its wings. It was a Tiger Moth.

"From the Flying Club in Regina," supposed Kirk. Then, "Easy, Barney."

The broncos were restless, their heads atoss and their sensitive ears twitching.

The Moth circled low. The pilot leaned out to look.

For a second they saw the flash of his smile. Then the plane swerved and rose. Barney laid his ears back and snorted and reared, but Babe stood still, quivering.

Kirk laughed and waved.

Down came the plane again and swept over them with a roar and a thunder of wings, then it banked and swung round and was up and over the rim of the valley, climbing swiftly, till the sound of it died away, and the sight as well, in the quiet blue of the sky.

Kirk's eyes were bright. "A slick way to travel," he commented.

"I'll take Babe." Kari ran her hand down over the smooth satin of her pony's shoulder.

Kirk laughed.

They came out on a gravelled road, and then on a wide, sunny table-land, where square stone gates opened on the green lawn, the garden, the many-windowed big house and the barns beyond, of Carrickfergus, their home.

On the low fence that edged the garden sat Olaf Andreson. As they came near, he rose, a smile in his eyes.

Kirk reached for Babe's bridle, and Kari slipped to the ground. She and her father sat down on the stone wall. It was quiet. A Sunday stillness lay on the countryside. Very clearly they could hear Kirk unsaddling the broncos and letting down the bars. They could hear the companionable whinnying and snorting, the sound of handslap on haunch, and the quick thunder of hooves as the ponies raced the length of the pasture field.

Said Olaf, "Hank MacAllister 'phoned. He's driving out. With Eric Blair, he said. The fencing master?"

Kari nodded.

"This Blair, is he coming to see you?"

Kari laughed. "No. He has a girl in New York. He's Hank's nephew. Son of an older sister in Montreal. Though he and Hank are more like brothers, really."

"Hank," repeated Olaf amusedly. "You call him that?"

"Not to his face. But he's not my teacher any more. Not since last June."

She leaned back against the gate and stretched out her legs along the surface of the stone wall. She wore slacks and a pale yellow sweater that was the colour of her hair.

"How is it," she asked idly, "that Grandfather built this fine stone wall and the big gateposts? There are no others around here like them."

Olaf's cool blue eyes crinkled at the corners. "Your grandfather built Carrickfergus in the days of the boom, when there was so much money in the country they didn't know what to do with it. Besides, when he first came to this place from Ireland, by way of Ontario, and looked down into this great, empty glen, he saw an estate here, and the beginnings of a clan, a 'valleyful of childer,' as I have often heard him say."

"Then?"

"Then, when his family was grown, the war! And one son was killed, and the other weaned away to the city. And only your mother was left."

"Till you came from Norway, by way of Minnesota."

He nodded.

Kari could see in her mind these two young men, each in his own time, arriving at this place. First, her grandfather, Tom Cassidy, pioneer, breaking the land, building a sod shack, then a frame dwelling, and finally, out of the rocks from the glacial drift that angled across the valley, this fine stone house of Carrickfergus.

Then in his time, came Olaf. The Celt, then the Scandinavian. Kari's eyes kindled with affection as she looked at her father—his length, his fairness, his gentleness, his icy Northern eyes, and that steely quietness in him that was both relaxed and ready.

"You know," he said now, "when I saw it first—the valley, I mean—it made me think of Norway, as I remembered it from the days of my childhood. The steepness, and the far view. Yet there was, of course, a great difference. There, the high hills and the sound of the pines, and the sea always near. While here,"—he lifted his hand and held it, palm out, against the warm wind that came sweeping up from the flats below—"here, wind and sun and, once over the lip of the valley, a thousand miles of level land."

Kari looked at him meditatively. "Norway, then the Middle West, then the War, and now the Qu'Appelle. Well, I'm glad you liked what you saw that day you came up from Minnesota."

He grinned. "I saw your mother."

She hugged her knees and laughed. "There she is now."

Nora Andreson stood on the porch steps. She was a big, black-haired, handsome woman.

"Come now," she called to Kari. "You'd better change."

They rose, then Kari cocked her head, listening. "Here they are."

A car swept round the driveway and came to a stop. Two men climbed out.

Hank MacAllister was dark and slim and thirtyish, and he walked with a limp. His nephew was also dark and slim, but he had no limp. Agile was the word for him. He moved easily, and he had a quick, friendly, fearless face. Olaf liked him.

Kirk came running at the sound of the car, and they all trooped up the steps and found seats on the wide porch that overlooked the garden. Wine-coloured dahlias, rust and yellow chrysanthemums, white phlox and golden marigolds, cosmos and snapdragon and salvia—it was like a bright carpet spread out before them in the sunshine.

"Yes," said Nora in reply to Hank's admiration, "the garden's mine." Her eyes roved over it in fierce, possessive pleasure. "Though why I bother, with all I have to do!"

They smiled at her, all of them. She sat there, full-bosomed, formidable and friendly, her skin like milk, her hair black, her forty years lying light on her, and she looked what she was, good-hearted, hot-tempered, a "hell of a fine woman," as the men on the neighbouring farms called her, "but not one to fool with."

Olaf said to Eric, "You've not been long in the West?"

"A year, sir."

Nora turned to him. "Then you missed the worst of the drouth. And lucky you were to miss it. Dust and desolation." Her eyes sought the garden as if for reassurance. "Trees dying in the valley. The gray ground sifting over the plains. Cattle starving. And always, always, the hot wind blowing."

Said Hank, "Eric can hardly believe me when I tell him that I drove to Moose Jaw one day in June and there was not a blade of green on the plains, not even a weed."

Olaf looked thoughtful. "But it's over. We may have dry spells, but I believe the big drouth is over. For another fifty years anyway. It's a cycle. Now if we can just weather the depression!"

There was silence for a few seconds, then Eric turned to Kirk and Kari. "The service clubs are putting on a gala night at one of the theatres. They want a demonstration of fencing. I thought of you two. The college not being open yet, many of the fencers are not available. But you and Maisie MacRae and myself, we could do something with it."

Maisie! They all looked at Kirk, smiling. He grinned back unconcernedly. Then he rose, limbered his knees, thrust and parried with an imaginary foil.

"Okay," he agreed. "When is it?"

"Tuesday. We thought you might drive in with us and have time for a workout or two tomorrow."

Kirk looked at his father.

Olaf nodded. "I'll get Dan."

"And you can stay with your Grandad, I guess." Nora smiled grudgingly. "In another week or so you'll be there all the time anyway."

"How does it feel to be through High School and out of my hands entirely?" asked Hank of Kari.

"It feels fine. Not to be out of your hands—if I am—but to be going to college."

He laughed. "I can never get over the likeness between you and Kirk. Do you know,"—he turned to Olaf—"I've had to carry their averages out to two decimals to see which came first?" Then he looked intently at Kari. "I've sometimes wondered. Are you glad to be so much alike?"

Her blue eyes met his seriously. "I'm glad." Then with a glint of fun, "Besides, it seems more successful."

Nora's laugh rang out. She rose. "Come in now, for a bite to eat."

In the evening they set out for Regina. As the car climbed up out of the valley, they rounded a little knoll, and there was a young man sitting, his arms clasped about his knees, very quiet. He looked lonely in the fading light.

"Why, it's Dan," cried Kari. She and Kirk waved and called to him, and a sudden smile distorted the broad, brown face. He was an Indian.

Kirk said, "When he smiles, he looks as if he was going to cry. Notice? But he's a good guy, Dan is. Ask Kari."

Hank shot her an inquiring glance.

She nodded soberly. "Well, he saved my life."

"Tell us."

She looked at Kirk. He said, "It was a few years ago. At the peak of the drouth. One of our neighbours had married a girl from Ontario. Things got too much

for her. Especially after her baby died. One day Mum sent Kari over with some things."

Kari sighed deeply and took up the tale. "While I was there the wind began to blow. You can picture it. That little gray house in the gray field and the wind whirling the dust and keening. She kept talking about her baby, and how lonesome it was there in the cemetery all by itself. And then all of a sudden she had a long knife in her hand, and I was out of the door racing across the summer fallow with her following. Close, too." She smiled ruefully, remembering. "I caught my foot and fell. Dan was out hunting gophers. He sent a rifle-shot near enough to scare her. Then he came running." She sighed. "I cried all over his shoulder."

Kirk went on. "Father wanted to send Dan to the Technical High, to equip him for a good job. But not Dan. You saw him back there on the knoll. He loves the valley. He belongs in it. And he's going to live there all his life. He's an Indian, he says, not a mechanic."

"The two are mutually exclusive?" smiled Hank.

"For him, yes. But he's a first-rate fellow. Dependable."

Kari nodded gravely.

Chapter II

NO RAM IN THE THICKET

ERIC BLAIR, besides being Athletic Director in the college, had been for a year the instructor in the local fencing club. During that year Kirk and Kari had been members of the club. Kirk was, in Eric's opinion, the most promising of all the younger fencers.

The night of the exhibition Kari and Maisie came out on the stage first. Maisie was a dark blithe girl with an easy laugh. She and Kari looked well together, one dark, one fair; and both were good first-year fencers. They saluted smartly, foil to forehead, then engaged. In their brief white kilted skirts, and trim jackets, they made a bright, flashing picture against the dark backdrop. The crowd, watching, clapped loudly. Some of them stamped and whistled.

The girls stood for a moment, acknowledging the applause, then as they took their places in the wings, Kari said, "Really, we were only play-acting. With Kirk and Eric it will be the real thing. It will be worth watching."

It was.

Eric played out his skill to balance Kirk's, so that they seemed evenly matched. He himself was agile as a cat, resilient as a steel spring. The bright steel flashed. The eye could scarcely follow the speed of lunge and parry, riposte and disengage.

Kari sat leaning forward, her mask dangling from her wrist. Her breath came light and fast and her eyes were dark with excitement. She had a queer feeling that the scene before her was in some way important to her and was to be remembered. The leaping, lunging, slim white figures, taut one moment, exploding into energy the next, again reined in, and always under control, the quietly spoken decisions of the judges, the clash of steel engaging, and the sharp slither as it was shorn aside—all of it, she consciously gathered in to be permanently limned on the retina of her mind.

The fencing over, Hank joined them at the rear door of the theatre and they walked homeward along the quiet streets, looking a little bizarre in their fencing clothes and feeling buoyant and light of heart.

Under the arc light at the corner of Lorne and Thirteenth a young fellow leaned against the fence and stared curiously at them. He was shabby. He looked ill-nourished as well, and at a loose end.

Kirk lifted a casual, friendly hand to him in greeting, and an uncertain smile flickered across the boy's face. There was no bitterness or revolt in it. He was simply poor and young and sad.

"Our under-privileged," said Hank in a low voice when they were well past. "That's the depression. Not as they talk about it in Parliament, but as it is."

The pleasure of the evening was wiped out for Kari,

and for some time she was not able to get the incident out of her mind. The memory of it came back sharply a few weeks later.

She and Kirk were now living with their grandparents and going to college in Regina. During the four years of their High School course they had done this, and the red brick house on Lorne Street was almost as much their home as Carrickfergus. Their time was well filled with lectures and study and the easy social life of their group. Nevertheless the economic distress of the time now began to impress itself on them.

On the prairies up to this time the drouth had overshadowed all other problems. Then nature had relented, the rains had come, and the earth was bringing forth a hundredfold. But to what avail if there was no price for their produce? If, in the cities, there was no work for men?

Late in the month an army of unemployed men marched into Regina from the west. This had happened before in other places, and whenever it did happen, the whole country looked on, aghast, ashamed and alarmed. Yet not so aghast, ashamed, or alarmed, that anything really effectual was done about it.

The news of their approach came to the Cassidys while they were at lunch.

Tom sat at the head of the table, white-haired, crippled with arthritis, but with the same harrying vitality in him that was in his daughter, Nora. Opposite him was his wife, small and gray and gentle as a nun, but never negligible.

The voice of the radio announcer broke in on a

programme to say that the jobless men were in Moose Jaw, and were on their way east. The voice was carefully non-committal.

The four looked blankly at each other, the two young and the two old people. Tom Cassidy moved a gnarled hand over his curly white head and swore softly.

"Can't something be done? What about public works?" asked Grandmother Cassidy.

"Taxes. It'd raise them. To do anything worth while. Country wouldn't stand for it."

"It's not much of a country, then," she said quietly.

"It's the way of the world." Tom reared himself heavily out of his chair. "And it's a damn' hard world. When it comes to money, you've got to fight for everything you get."

"Perhaps they will," said Kirk.

In the morning the men were in Regina. It was Saturday. The city was uneasy. The Council made provision for feeding and bedding them, but only for a few days. After all, they couldn't make it indefinite. Citizens discussed the matter on street corners and in their places of business, and from time to time their eyes veered away from each other in embarrassment. They were kind men. Somehow they had got into an intolerable situation.

The next day, at the Sunday evening service, from the Cassidy pew Kari could see a block of the unemployed men in the church balcony. Nearby sat a phalanx of the Mounted Police in scarlet and gold and polished leather. They were not there in their

official capacity, but to worship God. Nevertheless, beside them, the others looked drab and unkempt. An announcement was read, inviting the transients to remain after the service.

So, when the benediction had been pronounced, they filed down the stair to the basement hall. They were shabby. They were ill-at-ease. They smelled of sweat and unwashed clothes. They were also, most of them, young.

Kari watched them from the door of the hall. Nora was with her, in from the country for the week-end.

There was a short programme. A girl from the choir sang. A violinist played. Someone started a singsong. It hardly seemed to get going. What was there to sing about?

The smell of coffee drifted in from the kitchen. Immediately the heads of the younger ones turned that way. The minister, John Ahearn, stood watching. "All right, boys," he said. "Pull your chairs around."

Sheepishly they obeyed him, forming little circles. The coffee came in. A group of young girls served. They moved among the men, shining of hair, cared-for, sweet and clean. They gave more than coffee and sandwiches.

Mr. Ahearn said, "Now sit down. Eat with them."

Beside Kari was a boy of perhaps eighteen. There was a hole in the toe of his shoe and a gray sock protruded. He kept pushing that foot back beneath his chair, and forgetting, and then pushing it back again. He had a friendly, nondescript face.

She smiled around the circle. For the most part these

were boys who should be finishing High School, skylarking around on bicycles, taking their girls to dances.

"My name is Kari Andreson. Yours?"

They told her, smiling shyly, liking her.

Tom and Bill and Ed and Joe. Tony.

Tony was older. His eyes were sardonic. They said, "What do you think you're doing, my girl? Slumming?"

But the boy, Ed, put his hand out and surreptitiously fingered the soft flowered stuff of her skirt.

Nora joined the group. She looked round at them in a comfortable way. "Any of you boys ever been on a farm?"

"Ed and me," said Joe. "We used to go to my grandfather's."

"Well then, why don't you come home with me? Take pot-luck with us till things pick up. This won't last forever."

Joe's face shone. He forgot the hole in his shoe. "Ma'am, I'd sure like to. What about you, Ed?"

Ed chewed his lip. He looked across at Tony. "I don't know."

"A clean bed and a room of your own," cajoled Nora.

Ed smiled painfully. "Tony says that we got to stick together. I got to talk to Tony."

They went apart. Ed came back. "We were talking it over. I got to stick with the fellows. If we're to change the set-up, we've got to stick. Or, what's the use?" He looked anxiously around.

Nora got up. She laid a hand on Joe's shoulder. "Anyway, you come along, son."

Kari went to the cloak-room, found an envelope,

slipped a few bills in it, then wrote a line on the outside. She had to go to the front entrance to catch Ed.

"Here," she said. "This will be Joe's address."

Tony turned to her. He was sober now, not sardonic. "You see how it is? How we have to stick together?"

She nodded. She did see.

She went back into the church. There in the last pew of the darkened auditorium sat the minister.

"Oh," she cried. "You startled me."

"Did I, Kari?" he said in a queer voice.

She paused uneasily. "Is anything wrong?"

"I am ashamed."

"About the men? But it's not your fault."

"It is my fault. It's all of our faults." He paused, then went on heavily. "What they need is a chance to work, not a hand-out."

"Why don't we give it to them, then? Why doesn't the government?"

"They are afraid of the people. And the people are afraid of change. Meanwhile . . ."

There was a stained glass window beside them. A streetlight shone boldly through it, outlining the figures. The boy Isaac on a pile of faggots, Abraham beside him, and nearby, the ram caught by his horns in a thicket.

John Ahearn pointed to it. "An old habit. The sacrifice of the innocent. The seed of the body for the sin of the soul. And today, no ram in the thicket."

The first week-end that Kirk and Kari spent at home, they heard Joe's story. He and Ed were the older ones in a family of five, in an eastern city. For some years

they had been on relief, with never quite enough to eat or wear, but managing in a thin sort of way. As the children grew older the situation became worse.

"It got so," said Joe, "that the kids were always hungry. They kinda whined around. So Ed and me, we made up our minds. We hopped a freight. We were on the go for a year. It wasn't so lonesome once we joined the marchers. Tony talked to us every night."

"What about?" Kirk was curious to know.

"The state of the country. For us, no work, not enough food, nor enough clothes; and for the big guys, more than they could use. Potatoes rotting in the ground. Milk poured out in the ditches. Hell, that's not right, any way you look at it—with kids hungry. But nobody did anything to stop it. Nobody would, Tony said. It would take a war or a revolution."

"Revolution!" They were sitting on the steps of the back porch. Before them was the garden, and beyond, the quiet, sunny stretches of the valley.

"Why not? Not much sense in the set-up we have now. When we'd be going through a town, Tony'd say, sort of mocking, 'Look, there's food.' Big bunches of bananas, or bread, or steak. 'Why don't you help yourself?' And if a guy made a move, he'd yell, 'Come back, you fool. Don't you know you've got to be rich before it's safe to steal?'"

He got to his feet, and stood, feet wide, his honest, freckled face puckered into a frown. "So I figure that when the underdogs get wise the way they did in Russia, they'll shoot a few hundreds of the die-hards, then we'll divide up even and we'll all have enough. Tony said it needed a spark. He said, first thing we

knew the big guns would cook up something, a war maybe." He sighed. "Well, I got to feed the horses."

"But," protested Kari dubiously, "if we were evened up, we wouldn't stay that way. Anyway, are you glad you came out here?"

Joe's face lighted up. "I sure am. It's like home to me."

Kari watched him walk down the slope to the barn. "Well," she said thoughtfully, "he's settled. But there are a lot of others."

"Something will turn up," murmured Kirk.

She looked sharply at him. "Not war. There'd be no sense in that."

There was a bright, hard smile in his eyes. "Who are we to say? If it comes, it comes."

Only a few weeks before, an elderly statesman had returned from a meeting in Munich and announced to his countrymen: "Peace in our time, gentlemen." But men knew in their hearts that it was not peace, but only a reprieve, and beneath all life from that time on ran an undercurrent of uncertainty and fear. As the months slipped one into another and it was winter again, the tension grew.

One night in February, a group of young people gathered at Maisie's after fencing. They talked for a long time. They were trying to get some things clear in their minds, these eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds. It was quite important that they should get them clear. Things like peace and war. Because, if it was peace, they would live. If it was war, some of them, at least, would die.

No one said it, of course. No one needed to say it.

The conversation began in an inconsequential way, all of them sitting relaxed and easy about the fire. Maisie had switched off the lights, except the small hidden one that illuminated the painting over the mantel. It was a winter scene—blue shadows, snowy ramparts, the curve of a bridge, and houses hugging the river.

"A Henderson!" commented Hank idly. "How he does love to paint the valley! You know," he went on, looking round at them, "I read somewhere that a work of art must be also a work of love. What do you think?"

There was a moment's silence. Obviously they didn't think. That was Hank all over, throwing out an academic something and teasing them with it, till they got their mental teeth in it and worried it and made something of it. Just now they felt easy and indolent. They smiled back at him, their minds idling.

Then Franz spoke up. "I do not agree, sir."

"Drop the sir." He tamped the tobacco down in his pipe and looked irritably at them. "None of you are my pupils any more. Call me Hank."

There was a burst of friendly and affectionate laughter. "Okay, Hank," they said experimentally, and laughed again.

"Well, Franz, why don't you agree?"

"It's this way, sir. Sorry! Hank. I think a work of art must be, first of all, strong and savage. There's been too much talk of love. The word today is power."

"I see. Barry, what do you make of that?"

Barry Ostrum sat cross-legged on a cushion before the fire. He swallowed, smiled, then with nervous

firmness in his voice, "The word now may be power, but the final word is love."

"No! Power!" Franz' face reddened. He was a short, thick-set fellow, with a foreign breadth of cheekbone. "Power comes before peace. It means to be able to do. It is inner and outer strength. Blessed are the powerful." His big hands clasped and unclasped. "Me, I'm an Austrian. I know what I'm talking about. It will take more than soft words to beat the Nazi."

"Nevertheless," said Barry quietly, "they that take the sword shall perish by the sword."

"Why not? A man dies, one way or another." Kirk looked round at them with a bright, fated smile in his blue eyes. "I don't think there's anything for us to argue about. If war comes, we meet it with everything we've got. That's the way it's been for a long time. The defence of the tribe. What else can we do? We're too young to do anything else."

Too young! The words milled uneasily in Hank's mind. Too young to do anything but die. There was a moment's silence. Hank looked down at his lamed foot. Eric and Kirk smiled at each other in a brotherly sort of way. Barry's face was troubled.

Up to now the girls had been silent, as though biologically barred from the discussion. Now the barrier broke. One of them got noisily to her feet. She reached for a handful of Franz' fair hair, clutched and shook it.

"No more crazy talk, big boy. Come and dance."

He rose and scooped her up with one arm. The rug

was pushed back, records were put on, and they danced. All but Kirk and Maisie. They sat for a while by the fire, not speaking, just near each other, like a long-married pair with years of quietness and understanding behind them.

Chapter III

THE SOUND OF THE TRUMPET

IN the spring the King and Queen visited Canada. The newspapers called it a triumphal tour, and so it was. Nowhere was the welcome warmer than in the stricken West. It was as if after all the hard times, the drouth, the depression, and amid the present threat of war, there came this moment of fairy-tale delight.

It was, in fact, a child-like interval of love and wonder before the world gave itself over to brutality. Because it was love the people felt. When Elizabeth smiled and lifted her hand in that incomparably kind and delicate gesture, their hearts went out to her and to the shy young king beside her.

The brief, bright hour of pageantry passed. It was summer again, and then summer was gone, and September came, and the third day of it. And the same young king in tired, halting, brave and irrevocable words, told the British peoples they were at war.

At Carrickfergus that Sunday morning, they were at breakfast as they listened. They sat still, avoiding each other's eyes. Olaf's face slowly whitened. Kari felt

herself trembling and was unable to stop. Kirk looked out of the window with an expressionless, still face.

Then Nora rose suddenly, flinging back her chair. "It's the English." Her voice rose stridently. "Getting themselves into trouble and calling on us to help. Our lads have no call to go. Be sure of that, all of you. Hasn't Ireland found . . .?"

"Be quiet!" broke in Olaf harshly.

And they were quiet, all of them. No more was said.

It was two weeks after, that Kirk spoke to his father. He brought the newspaper in from the box at the gate, glanced at the headlines, and handed it over.

Then he sat on the steps, his dog leaning against his knee, and thought briefly of his father. He was a quiet man who kept his troubles to himself. Yet one was at ease with him, because he so simply and straightforwardly accepted life. That made this moment easier.

He cleared his throat. Olaf looked up. Their eyes met. Olaf folded the paper slowly.

He said, "You're young. Could you wait?"

Kirk shook his head.

There was a silence.

"How soon?"

"After Christmas."

Olaf put out his hand. Kirk grasped it briefly, then flushed and walked away, conscious of a queer throbbing and fluttering in his throat.

The days flew by. Christmas came and went. Then in the first week of January, Kirk and Eric went to

Brandon to begin their air force training, and Kari enrolled in a Business School in Regina.

"Why not go on with your University course?" asked her friends.

"When Kirk comes back," she answered briefly.

She missed Kirk. But she could stand that. The monstrous fact that he was in preparation for a life of constant danger was what shook loose her inner serenity.

The planes that passed constantly overhead were no longer taken for granted and scarcely seen or heard. Now they held for her a fearful fascination. Sometimes she drove with Hank or Maisie to the airport west of the city and sat in the car and watched those planes, conscious of a desperate need to examine and understand something of this new world of Kirk's in which she had no part.

There they were—the throbbing engines, the whirring propellers, the weight and sharpness and impersonal strength of great machines. And swarming over them, climbing into them, pushing them into the wind, lifting them up thunderously and slipping through the clouds with them, were men. Young men, alert and co-ordinated of body, mind and nerve, yet flesh and blood nevertheless, and against that weight of metal, how unenduring! The bones of man, so light and fragile, the flesh soft, the bright blood welling at a scratch! Only the mind and will and spirit reached out, strong and fearless, to ride the wind and consort with the stars.



Winter moved into spring, and spring into summer. The news was bad. Norway had been invaded. France fell. Churchill promised blood, sweat and tears. The Luftwaffe and the R.A.F. were shooting it out over England's green and pleasant land.

In Canada an added urgency speeded the war effort. There were training planes now in the Saskatchewan skies. These, Kari watched often, of an evening, from the balcony of her grandfather's house on Lorne Street.

They swept widely across the southern sky, their wingtips red, then turning, the lights showed green, and they swung round and came down with a curious, tired, homecoming air, as if glad to be back again and all safe. Then another pair of red stars blinked in the south, swung across the heavens, changed to green, and had barely slanted earthward when yet another appeared in the upper reaches of the sky. One by one, evenly spaced, till all the flight was in. Like cattle coming home, thought Kari, to be safely bedded down. Coming home from starry pastures.

Soon the night flight would be going out, thundering up into the quiet sky. Oh God, she prayed, could You keep them all safe? Bring them home and set them down and let them go to bed again?

All too soon the time of Kirk's last leave came. He had two weeks. On the day before the last he and Kari rode over to the reserve to see Dan.

During the winter the Laurels lived in a snug log cabin. But when summer came, the grass greened and the trees budded, then ancestral habits asserted themselves. A tent was set up in the shade of the Manitoba

maples, and the cabin became only a storeroom and an auxiliary sleeping-house.

Near the tent was a tripod and a black pot slung over a fire of twigs. Dan's mother bent over it, stirring slowly with a long spoon. She had a still, dark face and a heavy body and her hair was in braids. She was as much part of the landscape as the Manitoba maples.

"Dan?" She pointed with her spoon up the rise of the bank.

At the sound of voices two fat youngsters popped out of the tent. "Hello," said Kari, and they smiled a queer, quick smile like Dan's, and ducked back within.

A cultivated field lay like a blanket over a swelling fold of the high, grassy bank. Here, Dan was digging potatoes. His spade-thrusts were clean and sharp, with the force of strong leg and loin muscles behind them. He wore faded drill slacks and his brown back was bare.

When he saw them he threw down his spade. They sat on the grass in the shade of a birch tree. A breeze came down over the ridge and lifted Kari's fair hair.

"When do you go?" asked Dan.

"Tomorrow."

Dan's face was impassive. He was an Assiniboine, and so was a little lighter in colour than those of other tribes. He was a handsome, sturdy brave, and if his life had been set a hundred years earlier it would have been one of adventure and esteem.

He said, "I was just finishing the potatoes. Because tomorrow I go into the city." The taciturnity of his face broke in the sudden distortion of his smile. "War! That's what an Indian is supposed to be good at."

"What are you joining?"

"The Regina Rifles. You know . . .!" He raised his arm and squinted along the barrel of an imaginary gun, and grinned.

"You're good with a rifle," said Kari slowly. "As I remember."

He turned to her with an odd, half-shamed look of affection. "That was one good day's work."

"I'll say," agreed Kirk.

They lapsed into an easy silence. They were of an age, and their lives had been close from childhood on. Now their paths were fanning out.

Said Dan, "I'll not be in paint and feathers. But I'll be there, as my father was."

"And mine. Strange, isn't it?"

Kari smoothed a blade of grass between unsteady fingers. "Wrong," she said in a low voice.

Dan looked at her. "Five years from now, I think I'll be sitting here on this same knoll and there'll be potatoes to dig."

Kari laughed. She had a queer feeling that if Dan said it, so it would be. "And Kirk will be over at Carrickfergus, and I'll be home for the week-end from wherever I'll be then."

Kirk smiled and got to his feet. He wrote briefly on a page from a notebook and handed it over. "Drop me a line when you reach England. We'll get in touch."

They rode home along the path that curved about the slope of the valley. The cherry leaves were red as claret, the poplars clear yellow, and the Manitoba maples a rusty brown. In the folds of the bank on the far side, small shrubs grew in a pattern of smoky autumn colours, maroon and dull rose and tarnished

gold. Kirk looked soberly at it all, as if to fix the picture in his mind.

The next day he left. His family and friends stood on the station platform and watched the long dark train move wailingly off into the east. It gathered speed as it went.

What is worse, thought Olaf, than the loud, sad sound of a train whistling to itself and plunging into the distance?

He looked at Maisie. Her face was wet with tears. He turned to Kari. There was an uncertain, desperate look in her eyes that he had never seen there before. It troubled him. The bond between twins was a strange and unexplained thing. He searched in his mind for something to help her.

That night he knocked at her door, and when she answered he came in and sat on the edge of her bed. He looked at her and he thought, "She is a woman. She is also desirable, now, with her pale gold hair in a cloud and her white shoulders bare."

He clasped his knees with his brown, hard hands, and rocked himself back and forth. He said, "We must have courage, all of us. Kirk has. There are different kinds of courage. That is what I want to tell you."

She looked at him, not understanding, but trusting and responsive, like a child.

He went on. "Being in the last war, I had a chance to find out. Some have courage of the body. These are good soldiers, unimaginative, practical, brave men. Then there's the courage of the will. Suppose a man is, naturally timid, sensitive to blood or loud noises.

But because he wills it, he does his duty if it takes the heart out of him. He's a brave man, too."

"Kirk's not like either of those."

"I know. Kirk is carried along by the natural ardour and eagerness in him. Not so many have that kind of bravery. Danger is not so hard on those who do. Most of the time they can rise above it. I get a certain comfort out of knowing that Kirk is like that. So I wanted to tell you. Not any less danger, you know. But much less misery."

He thought, has it done her any good? What is she thinking?

Then she put her hand out and he took it, and they smiled at each other. There was shyness between them, but there was also love, fumbling across a generation.

During the winter that followed, Kari worked in a newspaper office. She gathered copy. She attended meetings and reported them. She interviewed visiting celebrities. The veteran women's editor, who was over her, coached her, revised her script when it needed it, and in a constant running commentary of advice gave her a practical course in journalism. The office was a bright, busy, engrossing place in which to work. Perhaps this is what I shall do all my life, thought Kari. But she doubted it.

Chapter IV

HALFRID

HANK MACALLISTER sat at his desk and turned a letter over and over in his hands. Then he smoothed it out and read it again. It had been written four days before, on the sixteenth of June, and it was from his sister, Beatrice, in Montreal. It was about Eric. He had been killed in a plane crash in Wales.

Hank looked grimly down at the written words, so few, so devastating, and he thought of the writer. Of Beatrice, who had lost her husband in World War I, and her son in this war. Her face took form before him, her dark, alert face, so like Eric's. The same taut, dynamic stillness in them both.

So this was the end of Eric. Of Eric who had been so definite a person in himself, who had kept his own counsel, and thought his own thoughts, and faced life with vigour and directness. Eric had not been run-of-the-mill. There would never be another like him.

Hank put the letter away and went out and walked up one street and down another, his hat low over his eyes. Crossing Victoria Park, he came on Kari and

Maisie. Maisie was reading parts of a letter from Kirk. Both were laughing. Cried Maisie,

"Listen to what Kirk says. When a fellow gets a letter from his girl, *breaking it off*, he tacks it up on the bulletin board. Then all his pals write her, telling her what they think. Kirk says she'll learn a lot of new words."

Hank listened and smiled and in a few minutes left them, without telling them about Eric.

He thought of that girl in New York of whom Eric had spoken from time to time. Though he had said little, Hank knew she was important to him. How was she taking the news that had by now reached her?

He came along Scarth Street. Before him was the red brick block of the gymnasium where he had so often seen Eric fencing, his eyes bright and his wrist agile and the long foil flashing. Would there be for him some heavenly jousting? With swordsmen who had died a thousand years ago?

Hank sighed heavily. There was no comfort in fancies and conceits. He looked down at his left foot, his limping left foot that kept him earthbound and safe. His mouth twisted. Was he glad of his lameness or sorry? Had he not been lame, would he have enlisted? He believed he would, but he would never be quite sure whether or not he had it in him to take his life in his hands and offer it up, which was what boys by the thousands were doing these days.

He was older, that was it. More aware of all that was involved. To be young was to be reckless and eager for adventure.

He pulled himself up short. Eric and Kirk. Had they no plans, nothing to give up? A dull shame burned in him.

Eric's death came as a shock to the city. As yet there had not been many casualties, and Eric had been well known. The members of the Fencing Club felt it. And none more than Barry Ostrum.

He was walking along Albert Street when a car stopped beside him.

"I've a call to make at the Grey Nuns' Hospital," said the Reverend John Ahearn. "Come along."

They crossed the railway and turned west on Dewdney before Barry spoke. "Eric Blair's dead," he said.

"I know."

There had been rain. Water spurted from the swift smack of the wheels on the pavement, but the sun now shone out strongly.

Barry squinted his eyes against it. "I don't believe in war," he said suddenly.

"Did Eric, I wonder?"

"He didn't see it as I do. I look at it this way. I am a Christian."

The minister smiled.

"I'm sorry, sir. I forgot you were in the last one. But to me, war is the mother of all evil. Cruelty, lust, lying, avarice, all blown up into new life by it."

"Granted."

"Well, it seems simple. The sooner people will have nothing to do with it, the sooner it will stop."

"And in the meantime?"

"Surrender."

"And let freedom vanish from the earth?"

"What is freedom?"

"My God, ask the Poles or the Jews."

"Christ said 'Turn the other cheek.'"

"Not somebody else's other cheek. He also said something about being your brother's keeper."

They pulled up before the hospital. Said John Ahearn, "I'll be only a few minutes." Then he leaned over the wheel. "I'm going in to see a man who is dying a slow death. All the skill of science is bent on giving him just a few more days of pain. To me it seems degrading. Eric went out, crashing into a mountain. A better end."

"But he missed a lot of living."

Ahearn's fist came down on the wheel. "But he's not through living. Don't forget that, you—Christian!"

"I apologize," he added swiftly. "I was fond of Eric. But so were you. God help us all. War!"

On the way back they talked of other things. As the car slowed down before the manse, the minister said, "Come in, Barry."

"Someone else is coming, sir."

The man walking to meet them was tall, thin and young. He had large gray-blue eyes. His clothes were in tatters, his shoes covered with dust. He bowed stiffly, then held out a letter.

"The Reverend Mr. Ahearn?"

"Yes. Come in, won't you?" He opened and read the letter, then thrust out a hand. "I'm proud to meet you. Now, sit down, son. You've come a long way."

"This is Barry Ostrum." He consulted the paper.
"Halfrid Haakanson."

"I go to the church in each town," explained Halfrid,
"to see the pastor. He sends me to the next one."

"How long since you left Norway?"

"More than a year, sir."

"Stay the night with us."

"Thank you extremely, sir. But I am in great speed.
If you would direct me."

"I see. The man you want lives north of the city.
But his daughter is in the city at her grandfather's.
Kari Andreson, Barry."

"Kari," repeated Halfrid and smiled.

"You might take the young man to Cassidy's, if he
won't stay longer with us."

They left at once, Halfrid bowing from the hips in
stiff, foreign courtesy. "I thank you extremely, sir,"
he said again earnestly.

That same evening Kari drove Halfrid out to
Carrickfergus. Olaf was standing on the porch as the
car pulled up, and in the space of time it took the
Norwegian lad to cross the lawn, his mind had flashed
back to his childhood.

He could smell the sun on the pines. He could hear
the lapping of the water in the fjord. He could see
the street, the house, the people in it, his grandmother,
for whom Kari had been named, his uncles, even a
small girl-cousin called Kristin. It came back to him,
all of it, in the fairness, the tallness, the indisputable
look of family that was on the long, ragged lad coming
up the steps to him.

"You don't need to tell me," he said unsteadily.

A little later Halfrid took from his breast-pocket a small wrapped package. "I have here two papers. They are all I was able to take with me." He handed them over.

"This is . . .?"

"My commission in the Norway Air Force."

"And this is your birth certificate. So you're Kristin's boy. Tell me, how is your mother?"

Halfrid's blue-gray eyes flickered. "I am sorry. I do not know."

There was a pause. "You will have a tale for us," said Olaf slowly. "But at your leisure."

Halfrid looked around the comfortable living-room. The evening breeze fluttered the curtains at the window, and the soft, wild smell of sage came in from the fields, and from the gardens the fragrance of white stocks. The tension in him seemed to relax a little.

"Now I will tell you," he said. "It was in the spring of the year. The Germans had landed. We made our plans quickly. We took what we could carry and we went up into the mountains. We made shelters, we organized, we prepared for resistance. I said good-bye to my family there." He paused and laid his long hands over his knees and clasped them hard. "Nearby stood a blasted pine. Lightning had stripped it. It was high and very plain to be seen. I took it as a marker.

"Then I rejoined my squadron. We went up against the Messerschmitts. But it was of no use. We were betrayed. So one day I loaded my plane with food, ammunition, clothing, all in a great bundle. I found the blasted pine. I dropped my load. Then I flew on

as far as my gas would take me, which was just over the Swedish border. There I set fire to my plane."

He stopped abruptly and dropped his head in his hands. It was darker now outside. Fireflies flickered and a full moon soared high over the valley ramparts. They sat still listening.

"I had two addresses," Halfrid resumed. "A cousin's in Scotland, and yours, sir. My mother said, 'Olaf will be kind to you.' We talked it over that day in the mountains. Scotland was near, but the Nazis closed the way. I took the long road."

Kari exclaimed. "What a terrific trip! Russia! How did you manage?"

"I worked. I earned money for clothes as mine wore out. I kept making my way east. In China I signed on as a deck hand. Once I reached this continent, it was easy."

"Did you hitch-hike?" asked Kari. "You know." She held up her thumb.

"No. But when one offered me to ride, I was glad." He looked down at his clothes. "I have nothing but what I have on."

Nora said, "Kirk's clothes will fit you well enough. I'll lay them out tonight."

"You are most kind. I am a little tired."

He rose and crossed the room. On the mantel there was a picture of Kirk, in uniform. Halfrid bent to examine it.

"So this is the son who flies," he said softly. Then he stiffened, and his arm swung sharply up to the salute. Behind him, Olaf's face was suddenly wet with tears.

Ten days Halfrid spent with his cousins. Kirk's clothes set well on his shoulders but were slack about the middle, and the trousers were short.

"See," Halfrid explained to Nora, "I let the braces out very far, and the pants, then they reach to the shoe."

"Give me time and I'll make the vest fit, too," said Nora.

She did her best. Day by day the dark circles faded from beneath Halfrid's eyes and his cheeks filled out. Now his hands did not seem so long, nor did his knees thrust up so sharply.

Olaf said to him one day, "Could you trace your family through the Red Cross?"

"I am afraid to try lest I draw notice to them if they are yet in hiding."

"I see."

"I am hoping they are alive. But naturally I do not know. When I get to England I may find means." He frowned, then snapped his fingers impatiently. "But first I go to Little Norway, which is near a place they call Toronto."

He laughed. "Overseas, perhaps I shall meet my cousin. I shall say 'Hello, Kirk,' and then I shall open my shirt and say 'See, it is your underwear I have on.'"

They missed Halfrid after he left. He was one of the family now. He was also one of that greater family, the brotherhood of the sons of freedom who were risking their lives for that freedom.

Overseas, he and Kirk got in touch. It was some months before they managed it, but towards spring they spent a leave together in Scotland.

Both of them wrote to Carrickfergus about that, and about their plan that, when the war was over, Kirk would go home with Halfrid for a holiday before coming back to Canada, if military regulations and the state of Norway permitted. Always providing that Halfrid's family were alive.

They were both on operations by that spring of '42. Kirk had carefully refrained from mentioning the fact, but Halfrid revealed it.

The months slipped by. The war news was various. Bataan had fallen. The Axis armies were sweeping on towards Alexandria. And in August a force that was largely Canadian raided Dieppe.

There were long lists of casualties. Army, this time, instead of air force.

The situation was not disheartening. The Allies were confident of ultimate victory, but they were beginning to realize the inevitability of the price that had to be paid.

Not by food production, nor by the manufacture of ammunition, nor by the building of planes or tanks, nor by diplomacy was the war to be won. It would be won by blood. That fact remained true, as it had been true in the days of Xerxes and Genghis Khan.

Chapter V

TO NORWAY OVER THE SEA

A BLANKET of cloud lay snugly over the North Sea. Through it, flying blind, raced a flight of four Mosquito bombers on their way to Norway. Kirk Andreson piloted one of them.

Kirk had changed somewhat since he had left the valley of the Qu'Appelle. He had now the air-crew look. It came from being too tired, too often. Also from living close to death and danger, and not talking about it.

For some time he had been separated from the friends with whom he had come over. From some of them he had been separated permanently. It tightened a man up when his buddies "bought it." He never mentioned them as a rule, but he grieved silently, and numerously. That was it. Numerously. One after another. Night after night. Till one had more friends in what the padre hopefully called "The Command Higher Up", than here. It was a queer, disjointed, bitter world, this was, when one stopped to think. And the war made one think.

But of late his natural buoyancy had come back. And with it, some of the initial exaltation he had felt in flying.

Today, for instance, up here in the midst of a great whiteness, shot through with shafts of sunlight and medallioned with pools of blue, he had a sense of being upheld by more than air, of going on joyously and invincibly forever.

His eyes crinkled with amusement. A flying man gets that feeling once in a while. When things are going good. As they were, just now, for him. One thing, he was piloting a Mosquito, a wooden wonder, just recently released by the Air Ministry without publicity, two-engined, swift, manœuvrable, and with a sting in the tail. A crew of two: A twin ship. He laughed silently and looked across at Pete, the Aussie, who was his navigator. Good type, Peter. A homely face and a heart of gold. Also a wizard navigator.

The Mosquito was made of wood. It was light and strong. A high strength-weight ratio, the engineers called it. Spruce, Peter said last night in the mess, was stronger, ounce for ounce, than high-tensile steel or duralumin.

Spruce. Sitka spruce from the Pacific coast. Kirk had seen that rocky, western shore. He remembered the thick, dark trees, straining the salt wind through their branches, strengthening their fibre, till in the end, here in this plane were the laminated bulk-head flanges, the ply-wood forms, the spar blocks, all made of wood grown tough bracing itself against the gales of the North Pacific.

Kirk felt a further sense of elation because he had been picked for the trip to Oslo. It was the culmination of long months of reliable flying. He admitted this privately, but to his friends he'd have called it a piece of luck. Nevertheless he was pleased. He was going to his father's old home.

He could hardly expect a welcome. There were bombs in the belly of the plane. Just the same he'd be dropping in on them this fine September afternoon. His face lighted up in a wide anticipatory smile. Beside him, Pete was whistling through his teeth and looking happy and excited. Like Kirk, Pete had come half round the world; only it was the other half, and here they were together on their way to Oslo.

Of course they might catch a packet and this bright day be their last. Just now, he didn't believe it. This sense he had of life going on, was too strong. He had so much unfinished business. He thought of Maisie. He thought of Kari. Of his father.

"What do you know, Dad? I'm on my way to Oslo."

He thought too of his mother. He had an amused, affectionate admiration for his mother. The harrying force that was in her, her generosity and courage, even the rough edges of her personality delighted him.

The thick mass of cloud through which they were flying was now lightening. Longer and stronger shafts of sunshine pierced it. Finally it broke and dissolved away. Actually, they had flown out of it. He looked back and there it was, white and solid like an island in the sky. While they were now in the midst of a great blueness, a vast blue brightness, so luminous and lovely that it lifted the heart like a peal of bells.

They were over the Skagerrak now. Pete gave him a course. Swiftly Kirk reviewed in his mind what he had been told in the briefing. The high town hall, good to get a bearing by, the Royal Palace, and the Gestapo Headquarters—the target.

They flew on up the sun-filled fjord. Kirk now ceased to be Kirk Andreson, full of memories, dreams or exaltations. He became a pilot going in to bomb. Everything else was wiped out. For this moment only, he lived.

They swooped low. Beneath them, white sail-boats ran before the wind. Spruce trees were dark green on the mountains. Southeast of the city was a small hill. They came in low, behind that. Oslo was spread out before them, clean and bright and many-coloured. Spires and roofs, gardens, parks and streets.

Now was the time when seconds lengthened out strangely, ominously, inviting danger. Danger came. A flight of Focke-Wulf 190's came round the other side of the hill and met them. Guns flashed. One of the Mosquitos took it square, the port engine went ablaze, and the plane plunged into the rippling sea-blue waters of the fjord. In a moment all that was left was a little floating wreckage.

The three others roared on over the house-tops. They reached the target. The bombs plummeted down. They were pursued, but they outstripped their pursuers. They got back to England.

"Mission accomplished," the crews reported.

They were tired, triumphant, safe. Three out of four were, that is.

Chapter VI

THE ICE OF SHOCK

IN September in the valley of the Qu'Appelle the choke-cherries ripen. The Indians used to gather them and dry them and put them in their pemmican to add flavour and health to the buffalo meat. Now, prairie housewives make of them a tangy, dark red jelly.

So, one Saturday afternoon, Kari gathered a basketful. Methodically she pulled the branches down and stripped them, while Rex, the collie, dug for gophers on the hillside or, tired, lay at her feet, his tongue lolling.

The cherries were a rich Burgundy red, and the mellow ones nearly black. The sun was warm. Kari felt it on her bare head. The ripe smell of summer was everywhere, and the colour and the fruitage of it. Only the blue haze over the far stretches of the valley spoke of autumn.

Her basket was full. She pulled some yellow daisies and laid them on top of the cherries. As she came through the stone gate and crossed the lawn, Rex bounded along before her, his bright coat rippling in the sun.

Her father and mother were on the porch, not talking, just sitting there. On the table beside them was a sheet of yellow paper. Neither spoke to her as she came up the steps. They looked heavily at her. She knew then.

She picked up the telegram. The letters blurred, then cleared. She read it and laid it on the table. Then took it up quickly again. The words were still there. "Killed in action." She sat down, her mind floundering. One part of it struggled to grasp the meaning of the words, but another part sheered away and refused to let them in.

The collie lay with his pointed nose between his paws, and his eyes watchful. No one spoke. They were like strangers. Olaf's face was set rigidly. Nora looked straight before her and breathed audibly. They were three separate entities, encased in the ice of shock.

Minutes passed. Kari's mind still fought to disbelieve, still came back to anguished acknowledgment. Never had she felt so alone. The passing thought came to her, that this was not the way she had conceived of sorrow coming to a family. She had thought it would have flung them weeping into each other's arms.

But this was not a grief that could be dissolved out in emotion. This was a violent wrenching, a sundering. The pain was like a physical one, clutching and tearing at the muscles of heart and lung. Under it, they were silent.

A cricket chirped beneath the steps. A cow-bell tinkled from the pasture. Rex pricked up his ears. Everything was the same, and nothing was the same. Nor would it ever be. Kirk was gone.

Kari sat looking down at her hands clasped in the lap of her brightly-patterned skirt, and at her slim, brown legs. She was alive and Kirk was gone. That was the first thing to come clear in her mind. It was monstrous that she was alive, and Kirk was dead.

On the pain of that thought, she picked up her basket and walked through to the kitchen. She sat down on the stool by the window and little by little let the truth seep into her consciousness. How did it happen? A crash? Fire? Frantically she rejected the thought of that. Panic seized her. She began to sob. Then she checked herself. She made her mind blank and bitter, and sat still in some obscure technique of self-preservation.

But her mind would not stay blank. She got up and went out the door. There, heads over the paddock gate, were Barney and Babe, stamping and switching and looking expectantly at her. She turned hastily away from them.

Past the garden was a grassy corner shut off by the granaries and shaded by scrub poplars. It was a private and secluded place. Through a screen of small, dusty leaves, the valley lay spread out. Kari put her head down on her knees and shut away the sight of it.

Her father came round the corner, hesitated, then sat down by her. They were silent. The warm wind made a whispering sound among the poplars and all the little leaves twinkled in the sunshine.

Kari looked up into her father's face and tried to find words to comfort him. There were no words. Finally, "We're not much good to each other," she said.

He nodded. "I know."

The next morning, she said to her mother, "Shall I stay on a few days, or go back to the office on Monday?"

"Whatever is best for you," answered Nora sombrely. "If you wait, it may be harder when you do go."

So Kari went. And Olaf and Nora were alone in the big house that Tom Cassidy had built when he dreamed of filling the valley with his children.

Olaf, always quiet, was now yet more withdrawn. And there was a change in Nora. A change that came about gradually through the days and weeks that followed. The old harrying will was still there, but the brightness and buoyancy was gone out of her.

There had been a strong, instinctive tenderness between her and her man-child, an unspoken closeness that needed no words. She thought of him now, constantly. She remembered him as he had been here at home. She pictured him flying. She saw him lying deep in the cold, restless waters of the sea. And, so seeing him, the blood-drained away from her heart, and all her youth died in her.

Kari worked on steadily in the newspaper office. She never mentioned Kirk. The other girls were a little taken back by her unnatural composure.

Said one of them, "Why doesn't she break down and cry? It's like she was cut in two. It's like she was dead."

Maisie was different. Grief swept over her and left her spent. She wept in Kari's arms. She went to bed, ill from weeping. She bent before the force of her trouble like a tree that bends before a storm, and the storm passed over her. Kari stood stiffly upright, and was like a tree stripped bare of branch and blossom.

Her minister said to her, "Is your religion any help?"

She shook her head. "My religion only goes down so far. This goes deeper."

He smiled a little sadly. "In time it will connect, I think."

She looked at him resentfully. "I prayed. We all did. These prayers got no answer."

"Didn't they? No is an answer as well as Yes."

She was silent a moment. "Then He said No to Kirk. When he was going down into the sea, I'm sure Kirk must have prayed. And God said No."

John Ahearn looked into her hard young eyes and answered slowly. "I think you underestimate your brother. I grant that in extremity we all call on God for help. But that isn't our best prayer. I'm sure that up there in the blue, Kirk prayed great, true prayers for victory, for peace, for those he loved. And God listened."

"Then He might have kept him safe."

"But there is no safety. There is no temporal security. There never has been. No economic security. No emotional security either. Man lives perilously. But there is a security of the spirit. Kirk has that now. I believe he had it before."

Not long after that, Hank MacAllister limped into the newspaper office and stood looking over the counter at the girls working at the far end of the room. He waved away an attendant and waited till he caught Kari's eye. She came over.

"Like to drive out home tonight?"

"Of course."

"I'll call around at eight. Right?"

She nodded, smiling briefly.

Then he went in to see the city editor. "How's she doing?"

"Okay. But she'll do a lot better in time. She's had a blow. In a state of suspended animation just now. It's a queer thing about twins. A psychic bond, I suppose."

Hank nodded thoughtfully.

That evening, driving north along the broad, straight highway, he said "Going to keep on with *The Leader-Post*?"

"I'll finish out the year. Then, I don't know."

"Like it there?"

"Yes. But I'm not much good, really."

"You could be."

She shrugged.

Frowning, Hank pulled off to the side of the road. A bluff of golden-leaved poplars stood between them and the sunset, and the light was strained through them. Kari looked inquiringly at Hank.

He grinned. "No, it's not to look at the scenery. I want to talk to you. Like a Dutch uncle. In ten years, Kari, you'll be one of those good-looking old maids that run this country. In the Civil Service. Or Social Welfare. Or teaching."

"What's wrong with the Civil Service, or Social Welfare, or teaching?"

"You tell me."

"Do you mean that I'll never get married?"

"Not the way you're headed now. You're withdrawing into yourself. Think of it this way. Kirk's gone,

but you're here. As like him as one human being can be to another. Give him a little longer life through you."

She looked at him coldly.

"All right, then. That was a shallow thing to say. Nevertheless, you need a fresh start. Here everyone knows you. They step easy around you. Tonight I'm going to make a proposition to you and your parents. Take it seriously, will you?"

That night at Carrickfergus, Olaf kindled a roaring fire of birch logs on the hearth and they all sat bathed in the yellow glow of it. Kari felt it warm and relaxing on her shins and on her hands and face. But she was not relaxed. Her eyes kept turning warily towards Hank.

Nora was knitting. A long gray seaman's sock hung down over her knees and her quick needles flew. There was less pleasure in Nora now, less sociability and zest. Also she looked older.

Said Hank, bending to pick up the ball of wool, and laying it in Nora's ample lap, "I had a letter from my sister in Montreal. Eric's mother. She's a widow. She has a florist's shop on St. Catherine's Street."

He paused to light his pipe, then turned to Olaf. "Beatrice has an opening for a girl in her shop. At quite good pay. A sort of saleslady and secretary combined. The last girl got married. I thought of Kari."

He left it at that and went on puffing meditatively. Nora's black brows met. "How come she told you all that? Did you write her first about Kari?"

Hank smiled wryly. "I did. I thought a change would do her good."

Nora's lip tightened. "We've had enough change."

"But Kari is young," he went on. "And it has cut close to the bone with her."

Olaf's eyes were on Kari, sitting so still and startled, her bright hair luminous in the firelight.

Nora's voice was unsteady. "It has cut close to the bone with all of us. What good will it do her to leave her family and friends? What of her father? It will be like losing his right arm."

Olaf spoke. "It's what will be best for Kari. Look at me, Kari. Would you like to go?"

She looked at him, as if there were no one else in the room. Her eyes asked a question and his gave reassurance. Then she spoke in so low a tone that they could hardly hear. "Kirk went that way," she said.

A log tumbled on the grate, and the collie got up, turned around and lay down again.

After a moment, Olaf said matter-of-factly, "When would she need to be there?"

Whereupon Kari went and sat on the arm of her mother's chair. "Will you mind very much, Mum?"

Nora looked up from her knitting. "Does it matter if I mind or not?" she asked in bitter humour. But she drew Kari close for a moment.

Part Two

JEFF AND KARI

Chapter VII

APARTMENT IN MONTREAL

IN two weeks Kari left for Montreal, feeling both diffident and adventurous. She had never taken so long a journey by rail before, though she had driven with her father and mother and Kirk to the Pacific coast one summer. This time she was alone.

Nevertheless, she reminded herself impatiently, all she was doing was going east to an assured job. It had not been like that when Kirk had travelled this road. A troop train, hurtling over the rails on the first stage of a journey to danger and death, that was what it had been like for Kirk. She sighed and sat looking out of the window.

It was flat prairie land that she saw, broken only by poplar bluffs and an occasional coulée. Miles of stubble and miles of summer fallow in a checkered pattern, and tractors bumping over the fields at the fall ploughing. Grain elevators marked the towns, grading their importance. A one-elevator town up to a six-elevator town. It was an easy index to prosperity and population.

Small brown stations flashed by.

Kari remembered her father and mother as they had stood on the station platform that morning, her mother's troubled face and her father's lonely one. Suddenly it seemed a monstrous thing to be leaving them. Why was she doing it?

Hank wanted her to come alive again, to break out of her apathy. So did her father. What was her own secret reason?

She knew.

It was as if she and Kirk were riding along the valley of the Qu'Appelle, and he, on Barney, rounded a headland and was out of sight. But, disappearing, he lifted a hand to her, and she dug her heels into Babe's fat sides and followed after. That was what she wanted to do. To follow after Kirk as far as she was able. Montreal was not very far on the long trail he had taken, but it was so far. She felt an obscure but real satisfaction in being on her way.

Dusk was gathering over the Portage Plains. The long, quiet fields stretched away to a vague horizon. The ploughed ground looked purple in the growing darkness. Lights pricked out singly here and there, or flashed by in constellations as the train pounded through the little towns.

The land was empty of harvest and closing in on itself for the winter. Wheat was not the only crop that had been gathered from it. There was that other one—bone and muscle and brain, young limbs and eager eyes and willing hearts. In strange places that fruit had been garnered, and the sorrow of the loss of it

lay over the land. Why should it not, thought Kari bitterly, for at least a little while?

During the night she woke. The train had stopped. She pushed up the blind and looked out. A small lake lay there, shining palely in the moonlight. The water was smooth like ivory and black trees bordered it. It was very still.

She leaned her forehead against the glass and watched. There was no sound, no motion, no faintest trace of life. Then, suddenly, a canoe shot out from the nearby shore, the moonlight touching a sleek, black head and the recurrent reach of an arm.

The lake had seemed to Kari infinitely lonely and remote, unpeopled as a star. Now, pushing into it was this brave small boat, and someone in it, someone going home. Was there a pinpoint of light on the far, dark shore?

The train shunted and moved on, picking up speed.

Kari lay with the moonlight slanting in over her, and thought of that man in the canoe. She felt drawn to him. She felt for the first time in her life comradeship and compassion based on nothing but common humanity, common weakness set over against the great impersonal forces of nature and of fate.

Her heart felt enlarged and lightened. It felt strangely warmed. She turned on her side and slept.

Another day and night passed, and in the morning Kari was in Montreal.

At the Windsor station she was swallowed up in the throng of people pouring through the gates. She was at a loss only for a moment, then there in front of her

was a gray-haired woman in a red hat. She was tall and thin. Undoubtedly she was Beatrice Blair.

"You're Kari," she cried. "I knew you at once. My brother described you exactly. This is Jeff. Jeffrey Gilbride," she went on. "My guest for the week-end. R.A.F."

Jeffrey saluted, and smiled down at her. He was a tall lad, and very English.

A small car was parked on a side street. They came up Windsor, inched along St. Catherine's, then climbed the hill to the north and stopped before an apartment block. The elevator shot up to the eighth floor.

Beatrice inserted her key. "I like a house, myself," she said. "But a lone woman!" She flung open the door.

Kari had an impression of light and space, soft colours and low chairs and paintings everywhere.

"After lunch, we'll take you to your own place," said Beatrice. "It was fortunate I was able to keep Betty's rooms for you."

She smiled suddenly, and her dark, lined face lighted up into brilliance. "Hank wrote of you, 'Kari will remind you of some of your Group of Seven paintings. A feeling of freedom. There's also a hint of hardness and a lot of generosity.' Was he right?"

Kari laughed. "I wouldn't know. But I'll look carefully at your pictures."

Beatrice sobered. "Eric gave me most of them."

They had lunch in a nearby French restaurant.

"The hors d'œuvres bring us here," remarked Beatrice. "Jeff likes them."

"You can have all you want. You've no idea how lavish that seems to me."

There was a boyish look about Jeff. It was his soft brown hair, probably, and his English complexion. But his eyes were not boyish. They showed signs of strain. He can tell me, thought Kari. He can tell me what it was like for Kirk.

Beatrice said, "Jeff's over here on a turn of instructing. He was shot up a bit over the Channel. He's at St. John's."

Kari looked inquiring.

"Thirty miles south of here. A French-Canadian town. Not bad."

"No bombs anyway," said Kari slowly, her eyes on him. Yes, he could tell her. He had been through it. Beatrice too carried the marks of what she had been through. Hank had been right in sending her to his sister. There was a bond.

She drew a long breath and smiled at the two of them. It was a trustful, friendly smile, her eyes soft, the kind of belonging smile her father knew, and Kirk had known.

Beatrice and Jeff were silent for a moment under the impact of it. A flush touched Jeff's cheek-bones. Beatrice laughed gently, and laid her hand over Kari's.

After lunch, they went to the apartment that was to be Kari's. An old red-brick mansion had been turned into several small suites.

"Betty left it fully furnished," said Beatrice. "It's a small place, but interesting. You walk up."

They did, for two flights.

The apartment had been originally one huge room,

but a kitchenette had been cut off one end, and from the other, a bedroom and bath. The resulting living-room was squarish and one side of it was practically all window. Kari crossed to look out. There was a garden below with dahlias blooming and a red rowan tree.

She turned back to the room. The floor was lacquered black. Before the window was a low-backed green sofa with a shaggy off-white rug before it. The slip-covered chairs were gay with crimson flowers. On the widest wall-space opposite the window, hung a large, gilt-framed oil painting of an old man in clerical dress.

He was a rubicund old man with a fat front bursting the buttons of his vest and a chin that bulged over his round clergyman's collar. His face was ruddy and his eyes were blue. It was the eyes and the mouth that set one back. No conventional benevolence here, but malicious humour and a vast joy in life.

"Who is it?" exclaimed Kari.

Jeff stood enjoying it. "Quite the most irreverent reverend I've ever seen."

Beatrice laughed. "No one knows. Betty picked it up in a second-hand shop. She called him her great-uncle Josiah. You can use him for an ancestor, too."

Kari smiled up at him, and he grinned malevolently back.

"You'll notice the fireplace is in the bedroom" said Beatrice. "They cut it off with that end of the living-room."

It was a tiny white marble grate set in the wall. Kari, used to the great hearth at home, was entranced with its air of delicacy and grace.

"It works well, too," said Beatrice. "Nice on winter nights."

That evening before she went to bed, Kari sat in the dark alone, before the big window, and looked out at the lights and the traffic and the great, sprawling mass of stone and steel and restless humanity that was the city. The roar of it came up to her, muffled but pervasive. Behind her, Great-uncle Josiah leered dimly from the wall. It was quiet, except for the constant slithering of cars along Pine Avenue. Then there was another sound. Footsteps padding along the hall. Surely they stopped just outside.

She sprang up, snapped on the light and flung open the door. An old man was standing there. He was thin, with spindling legs and arms and an unexpected abdominal bulge.

Kari looked at him questioningly.

"Good evening, my dear," he cackled, and moved on to the table beneath the hall lamp. He pulled open a drawer and fumbled within, peering at her over his spectacles all the while.

"So you're the new tenant. Pretty, too. Martha doesn't like them pretty. You've seen her. She runs the business. I'm the proprietor."

There was something odd about him, other than the spiderish look of his thin legs and protuberant stomach. It was his hair. It was black. Withered as he was, and his skin discoloured with age, it seemed as if all his waning vitality had flowed into his hair and his paunch.

"Well, good night," said Kari uncertainly.

"Good night, my dear. Time for bed for young ladies. Can't be too careful these days, with soldiers

and airmen around." He cackled again, his rheumy eyes on her.

She shut the door definitely, and clicked the lock.

As she undressed in the small yellow bedroom, she thought of the "proprietor", as he called himself. She could picture him sitting there in the hall, keeping a watchful eye on all the doors and feeling a sort of prying power over his tenants.

Chapter VIII

"FLOWERS" BY BEATRICE BLAIR

THE rising sun moved up over Mount Bruno and laid smoky shafts of light across the city. One of them pierced the leaded window-panes of a high, bare and beautiful room. First the walls were illumined and glowed like ivory, then the light picked out the dull gold frames of two pictures hanging side by side, the bed of black, polished wood, and finally the face of the woman who lay in it, quiet with sleep.

When the long rays touched her eyes, the lids flew open and she stared blankly and peacefully at the ceiling. Then into the quiet of the early morning came the sound of a plane, high over the city, its engines drumming softly. She listened, and sorrow came into her face.

She looked at the watch on her wrist. Seven. She could lie for a while, here in this place, and be herself. That was what the room was for, beside its obvious use for sleeping. She lay relaxed, her iron-gray head on the low pillow, her arms stretched out and her body making a long ridge under the smooth, yellow coverlet.

"Here," thought Beatrice Blair in sombre satisfaction, "I'm down to the basic me."

There were no feminine fripperies in the room. No dressing-table, sparkling with silver. No mirrors. No drawers or chests. All these were without. Here was just the bare room, the firm, smooth bed, and herself with her hair loose and no make-up on her, nor any of the bright glitter of her day-time self. And on the wall, where the light now fell fully, the two portraits of Alan and Eric. All the essential substance of her life was in this room:

Alan was in the uniform of a captain of artillery, Eric in airforce blue. They were alike. They were the same age when the pictures were taken. In fact they were the same age when they died. One was killed at the guns in 1916, and the other, flying a Spitfire just twenty-five years later. They were the men in the life of Beatrice Blair. Here, in this room more than anywhere else, she felt them near.

At any rate, here she need not keep up a brave front. She could be herself. She could be bitter and angry if she liked. Angry at the fact of war and the men who made it, and the twist of time that had thrown her life in the track of two wars.

Or she could be lonely and desolate to the very marrow of her bones. And there was no one to say, "My dear, time heals all," or "My dear, there's a sweet byè-and-bye," or "Eric would not want you to grieve." How did they know what he would want? Facile phrases, all of them, easy, empty comfort from easy, empty minds.

The morning light fell now mercilessly on her loosened hair, on the slightly flaccid flesh. But the good bones showed beneath the sag of tissue, and there was a bitter courage in her eyes.

She sat up, arms around her knees, and looked at Eric. His face was young and alert and there was a to-hell-with-it grin on it. Her own face firmed up as she looked at him, and a hard, harrying smile grew to match his. She bent her head and shut her eyes and said a brief, business-like prayer. When she had finished, she gave her two men a clear, shining look, a look full of love, and then swung herself out of bed.

She dressed quickly and got down to the shop by eight-thirty. Julie, her assistant, was already there. Kari came in directly.

"Good girl," said Beatrice. "Put your coat in here. You can wear one of my smocks till we get some for you."

Kari buttoned herself into the sage-green cover-all. Julie showed her where things were. She was a dark, plump little girl, whose English had a crisp French flavour.

Life began to stir in the little shop, labelled so smartly in frosty letters on the glass front, *Flowers, Beatrice Blair*. A truck rumbled up to the back entrance and the wide doors swung open. A bell at the front tinkled at the same time, and Julie went to wait on a customer. Ben, the man-of-all-work, came up from the basement storage room.

In the back of the shop, on a high frame beneath the glass roof, ferns and trailing ivy grew. The light that came through was green, as in the deep forest.

Here, Ben showed Kari how to trim the potted plants with gay paper petticoats.

A row of crisp pink begonias stood before them. Ben cut a strip of crêpe paper, folded and quirked the edge into scallops, whisked it around a pot and clipped it into place. Kari watched and followed his motions, but slowly.

"You'll catch on," he told her. "Oi've been doing this a long time."

He was a bald, oldish man. "Been here ever since she started," he went on conversationally. "Came from England, Oi did. But forty years ago. Wouldn't know it, would you?"

She smiled. "There's a trace of accent."

"Ever been to Blunderstone, Miss?"

"No. Has it something to do with Dickens?"

He rubbed his hands. "Where David Copperfield was born, that's all. See that ivy? Grows fine here in pots. Now, in Blunderstone, Oi've seen it seventy feet high. Up the steeple of the church it was. And that green and 'ealthy. No place like the old country for plants. Or was."

"Will be again, I'm sure."

"They do say"—his faded, blue eyes brightened—"that where the bombs fell, they turned up the seeds of flowers that hadn't been seen a hundred years or more. Now, wouldn't that be somethink!" He leaned on the counter and rested his chin on his hand. "Queer little flowers that Shakespeare knew, or King Alfred. Blooming away again in the English air. Poetical, I call it."

Kari looked kindly at him. It was poetical, indeed. And so was he, to think of it.

The shop was full of a cool, composite fragrance. Against this, little well-defined olfactory islands of perfume stood out, the clean, yellow scent of the chrysanthemums in the window, the languorous smell of roses, and the dark, earthy, emotional odour of the purple violets Julie was arranging on the marble slab that was a counter.

Beatrice reached into a drawer and handed Kari a pencil and pad and a jack-knife.

"The badge of our profession," she smiled. "Come downstairs with me and I'll show you the cold-room. Then you and Julie can go out for lunch."

Over the table in the restaurant, Kari and Julie looked measuringly at each other.

Everything about Julie was round, her face, her eyes, her body. She walked with a soft, padding, rolling gait, like a small sailor. Her skin had a smooth pallor, and her black, bright eyes were friendly.

"I think I am about five years older than you," she said. "But I feel more."

"Why?"

"Your colour. Like a blonde baby. My people, we mature quickly. Most of my friends are married and have four, five children."

"But not you."

"I am the exception. *Non*. I am the new *Canadienne*. I like the life of business."

"Were you born in Montreal?"

"No. Near Ste. Marguerite. My father raises mink.

He has also a place for tourists. There are thirteen in my family. I am the middle one."

"Where is Ste. Marguerite?"

"In the mountains. Very beautiful. In the city I live with my uncle. He also has a big family. Some day you will come home with me and meet them."

Kari smiled. "I'd love to."

"I have a young cousin who studies music. The piano. He will play for you."

A few days later Kari met another young woman, very unlike the small, friendly Julie.

She was putting the key in her lock, when a door opened down the hall, then a tall girl stepped out and looked speculatively at her. She had dark, arrogant, appraising eyes.

"I see you have Betty Grimshaw's apartment. Have you her job, too?"

Kari nodded briefly. "I have."

"Do you know a flower called Silver Shillings?"

"I've never heard of it." She pushed her door open.

Then from the other came a belated, but ingratiating smile. "I'm Leone Newell. Won't you step into my place? For a moment, even?"

The apartment was larger than Kari's, and much more luxurious, with chrome and white leather and mirrors everywhere.

"Some people dropped in the other day," explained Leone. "And one of the women said, 'What you need here is an armful of Silver Shillings. They'd be perfect in this room—their glitter and their simplicity.' Some-

thing like that, she said. I said, 'But I don't like them.' Now, the trouble is, I don't know what they are."

Kari laughed. "Neither do I. But, perhaps I could find out."

"If you would!"

Kari asked Ben about them the next day.

"Why, there they are," he said. "Some call it Honesty. It's an everlasting."

The thin, shimmering, moon-stone discs were like flung handfuls of coin, caught in the slim branches, and miraculously clinging. Silver Shillings was exactly the right name for them.

Kari rang Leone's bell that night to tell her.

"Oh, thanks," said the tall girl. "Are they pretty?"

"Very."

A few days later, Kari took an order from a customer. He was a typical, upper-bracket business man—pin-striped suit, white shirt, quietly expensive tie—probably in his late thirties. He ordered a dozen Joanna Hill roses. They were to go to Leone Newell.

Kari looked up from her pad. He was eyeing a basket she had herself put on the counter.

"These are Silver Shillings," she said. "Would you like some?"

"Gad, no. She doesn't like them." Then a smile creased his face and his brief, brown moustache quivered. He took her pad from her and wrote a name and address. "Send the Silver Shillings there."

Kari stared after him as he shouldered his way to the door. Queer, she thought. Leone and someone else.

Then she forgot all about it in the rush of the

afternoon. She was tired at five when the shop closed and she came out into the November air.

November here was different from the same month on the prairies. There, it was gray as steel, cold, and fine-drawn like an etching. Here, it was mist, and moisture from the river and a haze on the hills.

A hand touched her elbow. Jeffrey.

"Dinner?" he smiled.

They ate quickly, and while there was still daylight they drove up over the curve of the mountain to the Westmount look-out. There, sight-seers leaned their elbows on the stone balustrade, and squinted along bronze markers at Mount Bruno and Nun's Island and LaPrairie. Jeff and Kari turned their backs on them, crossed the road and climbed the path to the open park on the summit.

Jeff spread his coat and they sat down. Long claret-coloured leaves hung limply from the sumac boughs and a small elm was bright with tarnished gold, but the big trees that thrust up into the wind were swept bare, and their branches made a pattern against the blue autumnal sky.

Kari pressed her fingers into the fine, thick grass.

"Did you ever notice that grass grows like that in high places?" he said.

"No, I didn't. It's like hair. Green hair. Mermaids." They laughed idly.

From below, the sounds of the city came up to them. But from where they sat they could only see the fringe of it, the wide, encircling river, and the mountains to the south. Kari stole a glance at Jeff. He was not like any other man she knew.

He was tall, but not as tall as Halfrid, for instance, or her father. He had soft, brown hair, brushed smooth, and a well-bred English face, "controlled and cleanly", as Kipling put it. It was his smile that was his alone, that set him apart—that disarming, sweet, but somehow sad smile. That and the clipped, clear-cut music of his voice. But mostly his smile.

He turned and their eyes met.

"What was it like at home?" she asked slowly. "Before the war."

"It was fine. There were five of us, Derek, Cicely and myself, and of course, Mum and Dad. Dad's a quiet fellow. Mum was always full of life. She kept her troubles to herself and shared her high spirits. Even after Derek . . . That was in the Battle of Britain."

He ground out his cigarette in the short, green grass. "Every leave I had she made the most of. Parties and all that. I used to bring other fellows with me. Eric, quite often. Then one day, a German flyer jettisoned his bombs. The house went. Mum, too. She never knew she was hit."

"I'm sorry," said Kari softly and touched his arm.

He took her hand and held it companionably. "Dad and Sis now live with my grandmother. Dad's business goes on and Sis has a full-time job. That's the set-up. Now, it's your turn."

She looked speechlessly at him.

"I know about Kirk," he went on gently. "You don't need to talk about it."

"But I want to. You can tell me. He went into the sea. His plane was on fire. I keep thinking . . ."

Her head went down. Jeff moved closer and his shoulder pressed against her.

He said, "I've seen it happen many times. It's quick, Kari. Even at the worst it's that. I won't tell you it's easy. God, no. But it doesn't last long. That's hard comfort, but there it is."

After a few moments he spoke again. "There's something else. I was on a bomber. I look back at my crew and I realize that if I had met them in the usual way, they'd have seemed quite ordinary chaps. But night after night, we went out on trips when at any minute we might be blasted into eternity. We hit reality then at its bottom rung. In a queer way we loved each other. We knew each other just as men, in the realest way there is. A comradeship grew out of that, of the most basic and comforting kind. It made up for a lot. Now, Kirk had that." Few men in peace time ever have it."

They were silent for a little while. Then Kari dried her tears and turned her face up to him. "Thank you," she said, and he bent and kissed her.

They came down the path and crossed the road to the look-out. It was deserted now. A thick, hyacinthine veil of smoke and mist and coming darkness lay over the city and the lights pricked rosily through it. Towers and spires pierced it too, and bridges were flung like diadems across the dark encircling water.

They leaned over the balustrade and looked.

It was as lovely as a dream. It was as if the soul of this sprawling metropolis, full of greed and graft and love and hate and the patient labour of men, had in this mystic hour separated itself from its material body

and now hung over it in a sort of astral beauty and perfection.

Kari, watching, felt moved by it. She was also moved and disturbed by the growing intimacy of her feeling for Jeff. She had an impulse to retrace her steps, to get back to safe and conventional ground.

She said as they came into her apartment, "I feel as if my parents should be here to say Hello to you."

He gave her a quick, understanding smile. "You've conjured them up. I hope they like me."

"They should. You're a link with Kirk."

"No more?"

"Yes. More."

She made coffee and they drank it out of her thin red cups and ate crackers and cheese with it.

She looked like a school-girl in her green wool frock with her yellow hair flung back.

She said, "Tell me something else, Jeff. After some wars, like the French Revolution, a new idea came out of the struggle and a new way of living. Looking back, one can see that men did die then for something. What is this war about? Why did Kirk and Derek die?"

"You'd not ask that, my dear Kari, if you were in London. Over there, we're fighting for survival."

"Not Kirk."

"Ultimately, yes. If we had been defeated, in time they'd have come here."

"There's more to it than that. There must be."

"I see what you mean. I think it will come clear to us as we go along. Or at the end of the war. Meanwhile we take it as it comes. Right?"

"Right. More coffee?" She smiled ruefully. "I'm not always so sober."

"We had to clear decks. Now, shall we have fun?"

"Fun?"

"Yes. Dining and dancing. Whenever I can get off."

His eyes were gray. One of them had a fleck of green in it. In nine months, or less, he'd be back on operations. Going out over Europe night after night. Meeting flak, and night-fighters.

She nodded. "We'll have fun," she said.

Chapter IX

LAURENTIAN INTERLUDE

DURING the weeks that followed, the young English Flight-Lieutenant and the tall girl with the mane of pale gold hair, became familiar figures in the places they went to dine and dance. Sometimes, for a change of scene, they drove in Jeff's little car to an inn at the north of the island. Or they sat in the theatre in the friendly dark, holding hands and laughing together. If they were a little feverish in their pursuit of happiness, who could blame them? There was not much time.

Occasionally an American flyer from North Dakota came in to the city with Jeff, and then Julie joined them too, and the four dined at a small crowded restaurant in the east end, where there was good food and a warm, Latin atmosphere. Or they gathered at Beatrice's home for long, comfortable evenings before her fire, when they explored each other's varying backgrounds.

Gus, the American flyer, had been a cattle-rancher before enlisting. As a boy he had spent his summers

riding the range, and his winters at school, and then at State University. He had a ranch of his own now, in the level grass lands, just before the first rise of the foot-hills of the Rockies. He was nearing thirty, a great age in the air force.

"He has also been on combat duty," explained Jeff. "We speak the same language. We're old, compared to those downy chicks of ours who are learning to be flyers."

Kari and Gus called themselves neighbours, having been born on the same stretch of prairie, though separated by an international boundary. There was, in fact, a certain likeness between them, a friendly, fearless approach to life, the product of a land where there was room enough for everybody.

Indeed, Gus said to her one day in that lazy Western drawl that made her always a little homesick, "I was in Regina once at a Horse Show."

"You *were*? When?"

"Let me see. Eight or nine years ago. I never forgot how the Mounties put their horses through a sort of square dance."

"The Musical Ride. Gus!" She leaned forward excitedly. "Do you remember the jumping? Two youngsters on piebald ponies?"

"But I do! Of course. Two tow-headed kids. Twins, someone said. They took those ponies over the bars like veterans."

Kari turned to Jeff, her eyes misty. "Kirk and me," she said, and all at once she was no longer with them. She was back at Carrickfergus, and it was a cold winter

afternoon, eight years ago, and there were hard times in the valley.

Her father and her grandfather sat before a fire of poplar logs in the big living-room and she, Kari, sat hunched in the window seat, looking out over her clasped knees at the snowy valley.

"No," Olaf was saying, "no jumpers for the Fair, this year. Kate sprained a tendon."

"Babe can jump," said Kari. "So can Barney."

They both laughed. Olaf looked kindly at her. "They're only broncos."

But Tom Cassidy sobered. "It's a thought. The young 'uns on their ponies, and the ponies alike, too. We'll feature it."

So that was how Kirk and Kari came to jump their calico ponies at the Horse Show.

Kari came first, and Babe came casually cantering down the stretch, lifted and went over like a swallow. Then Kirk on Barney.

"Twins," cried someone.

Babe and Barney liked the applause, side-stepping and prancing a bit in acknowledgment. But Kari, looking very young in her white shirt and tan jodphurs, cast only a quick glance upwards, and Kirk seemed entirely unconscious of the crowd. But the people took them to their hearts. These kids from the valley were their own. The applause was tumultuous.

The whole affair was an excitement and a delight to Kirk and Kari from the time the Lieutenant-Governor came riding in, in gold braid and plumed hat, to open the show, to the last musical ride of the Mounted Police.

"The identical act put on in the Madison Square Garden," said the programme. Here the actors were at home, and the beautiful bays and their scarlet riders went smoothly and easily into their dance, waltzing and prancing and intricately forming and reforming to the tune of Bonnie Dundee.

It all came back to Kari in full sound and colour. She told them of it, her eyes glowing and her voice warm with excitement. And when she faltered a little over Kirk's name, Gus took up the tale.

Said Jeff, "I wish I had been there to see."

"Oh, but really," she demurred, suddenly shy. "We were so young. Probably it just seemed wonderful to us."

Gus was emphatic. "A bang-up show."

"What were you doing up there?" asked Julie curiously.

He grinned at her. "I was showing a cream-coloured stallion and a string of bays."

"*Mon dieu*," she cried, her eyes big.

It was plain that Julie fascinated Gus. And was in turn fascinated. One day she looked sadly across at Kari when they were lunching together.

"I think I am in love with that Gus Johnson. When I am not with him, I am remembering him. That is bad."

"Why? Gus is in love with you, I am sure."

"Oh, *oui*, I make sure. I lead him on. Do you think he would like to raise mink? After all, he is a farmer."

Kari laughed. "It's not the same. A ranch. Wide spaces. Hundreds of cattle. Horses, too. You'd love it."

"*Misère*, no." Julie shuddered. "I'd hate it. I could

never leave my own country. Besides, there's the difference in religion. So, it's bad. Indeed it is."

"Oh well," consoled Kari. "He'll be going overseas. Probably he'll meet someone else."

The black eyes snapped. Then she giggled. "You—how do you say?—pulled my leg."

As December moved on, the pace of business quickened in the shop. Christmas stock began to come in. Holly from British Columbia, some of it in wreaths and some in great, curving, thorny branches. Begonias of bright Patagonian pink. Azaleas like stiff little trees with blossoms of the loveliest, most variable shades of rose, crowded into a solid mat of bloom. Cyclamen with patterned leaves and flowers like poised butterflies. Jerusalem cherries, and tropical red poinsettias.

Kari held up a single white chrysanthemum, snowy petals whorled about a golden heart. It was so white it shone.

Said Ben, "In England we lay cheesecloth over them on poles a few weeks before Christmas."

"Why?"

"To keep off the smoke and the grime. So they'll stay unspotted from the world, as you might say, Miss."

They waited over time one night to dress the big window. Two spruce trees, evenly matched, were placed at either side, and a row of small ones marched across the space between. In front was a glittering snowy expanse, edged by a formal border of poinsettias.

"Now," said Beatrice, "I should put you and Julie kneeling on each side by the Christmas trees with spangles in your hair."

Jeff was in the city, and late that evening he walked home with Kari through the still, cold winter night. Particles of frost hung in the air, and around every street light was a halo full of bright, whirling specks like a miniature solar system. The snow crunched beneath their feet. Rime gathered on Kari's hair and on Jeff's eyebrows.

She laughed. "Have you ever before been frosted over like a Christmas cake?"

"Never so thoroughly. My lashes stick together. You'll have to ask me in."

When they came up the stair, old Mr. Osburn, the "proprietor", as he liked to call himself, was sitting at the table in the hall. He was writing, his lips moving, and his pen scratching noisily. When he saw them, his sunken mouth folded over in disapproval.

"The old boy has a fine time, hasn't he?" said Jeff. "Riding herd on you all."

"I suppose he thinks it's too late for you to come in. Would you like a hot drink?"

"Thanks, no."

He laid his great-coat on a chair and turned deliberately to Kari. He came close and put his hands on her shoulders and looked down into her upturned face. It was in full light. Her blue eyes, her lashes still wet from the frost, her fair hair thrown back. Her shoulders were slim and strong, and warm under his hands. They trembled a little.

He bent and kissed her. Gently at first, then holding her hard against him, her softness, her firmness, her strength, her yielding, and finally her ardour.

She freed herself, and there was a sparkle of tears and anger in her eyes.

He stood away from her then and spoke carefully in a low, matter-of-fact voice that shook just a little.

"Kari, I think I have six months yet in this country. Then I'll be going back on Ops. Not a very good risk, you see. There's that. Then there's this. I love you, very definitely and forever. Will you marry me on the third of January when I have a leave coming up?"

She was completely still. Then her hand crept up to her throat. "It's so short a time."

He smiled. "It's been forever. Don't you know it? Of course, if anything happened to me. . . . Perhaps they're right who say it's better without the ceremony. But there's something furtive about that. And I can't see you being furtive, ever."

She sighed deeply. She had not heard his last words. She looked into the future. She saw a bomber hurtling into a sky where flak traced a vicious pattern, where night-fighters went up, where searchlights caught and held and transfixed a plane like a moth on a pin.

She seized Jeff's hands and held them against her face. Tears slid through them, then she flung back her head and laughed. They kissed again, with ardour and ecstasy.

"Six months," she cried. "It will be wonderful."

* * *

Kari and Jeff spent their honeymoon in the Laurentians. Julie arranged it for them.

"I know the very place." Her round face was bright with pleasure. "It belongs to my father. A house and

ten acres between Ste. Marguerite and Ste. Adele. I will write my father at once."

She did, and a letter came back, and she relayed the contents proudly.

The four of them were having dinner at Julie's favourite east-end restaurant. The room was crowded, full of tobacco smoke and conviviality. Julie was in her natural element.

She sighed blissfully. "No one does things to a *poulet* like that old Gervase in the kitchen." She frowned. "You do not pay attention to your food, you English. Of course, Kari and Jeff, they are in love. The good victuals are wasted. Now me, no matter how I am in love, I eat. To keep up the strength."

"Cherry pie," drawled Gus affectionately.

She giggled. "Now I must tell you. For two weeks you will be my father's guests at that little house on the hillside. He is very romantic, my father. This beautiful girl from where the buffalo roam—in the song they do—and the brave aviator from over the sea! His eyes will fill, he will blow the nose with emotion. And if you will talk French to him, Jeff, just a little, he will like it so much. It is so sweet," she sighed, "to hear an Englishman talk French in this country."

"What of an American?"

"You don't."

"I can learn. There's only one way, they tell me."

"*Merci, non.*"

The house was even better than Julie had led them to believe. It was built of squared logs, white-washed, with brown shutters, and it stood among the birch

trees as if it had grown there. The living-room had large windows that caught the sunshine from three directions. Braided rugs made pools of colour on the painted floor. A small bedroom opened off the main room so that at night one could lie in bed and watch the fire on the stone hearth.

By day, they skied. Jeff had learned on winter holidays in Switzerland. Neither were expert, but they were good enough to enjoy themselves. Kari flashed down the slopes in her red suit, each time going higher up the mountain side to increase the length and speed of her run.

Once she fell and lay back, half-covered with snow, her head down the bank, and she looking up at the world from a new vantage point. The sky was a robin's egg blue with a few pink clouds trailing across it, heralding the sunset. The birch trees were parchment-white, scored with black carbon pencillings. Seen from this angle, the colours were more vivid, the outlines sharper, the world more than ordinarily bright and beautiful.

Jeff came swooping down and stopped in a flurry of upchurned snow, and lifted and brushed her. They kicked off their skis and sat down on a log.

The sunshine was warm on the sunny lea of the hill. Jeff opened his parka. He touched the sleeve. "Eric's," he said. "The whole outfit. These are experienced skis."

Kari said seriously, "I'm never going to forget this as long as I live. The snow, the trees, the hill, the house, and us."

"Especially us."

She nodded, her eyes on the straight blue column of smoke that rose from their chimney. The shadows began to lengthen. A gray bird lighted near and pecked at the red haws of a rose-bush, balancing itself with spread tail. It grew chill. They went in to the comfort of the fire.

During the night, Kari woke suddenly, her heart thudding. She sat up. In the dimness, the room looked lonely and strange. The fire had burned down to a ruddy glow among the ashes. Without, the birch trees were white against the blackness of the forest.

Jeff lay still. His face was expressionless. It was austere and cold like the face on a coin.

Then his lips began to move.

"Butch!" he cried in a hard, crackling voice. "Butch!" again, in violence.

Then quick words followed, run together. "Take over, Ed. A bandage. God, he's trying . . . Easy, chum, easy. Lean back." There was a long pause, then in a low, vicious voice came a string of profanity, phrases that Kari had never heard, but somehow knew. The very softness of the voice made the hot words more obscene.

Then he stopped. He sighed deeply. His face sagged, and he slept.

The next day as he helped her wash the dishes, she asked casually, "Who is Butch?"

He whirled on her. "Why?"

"You said his name in your sleep."

"Wireless Operator. What did I say?"

"His name. Two or three times."

"He bought it on a raid over Essen."

"Why did you call him Butch?"

"Same way a tall chap is sometimes called Shorty. He was an Oxford man. Handsome. Very intellectual type. Amazing command of words. Of all kinds. Absolutely fearless, too. Kept us all on an even keel."

"What happened?"

"Flak. A piece, like this, came up. Got him right in the throat. Tried to bandage it. No go. We moved on to target. When those bombs went down, they went as for Butch."

"His voice was smooth and bitter, and her face when she turned, was as hard as his. "When you go back, you might drop a few, as for Kirk."

His eyes gleamed. "I'll do that."

After a moment she forced her tone into matter-of-factness. "By the way, I gave Halfrid, my cousin from Norway, you remember, Cicely's address. He wrote that he would call on her, next leave."

"Good."

"She'll like him. You should see him, Jeff. So very tall. Blond like I am, even blonder, and shy, but with lovely foreign manners and saying 'Thank you extremely,' all the time. By now, though, his English will be better."

"I must look him up when I go back."

"When you go back! Don't say it. Go build up the fire."

When she came in to the living-room, he was sitting on the bench before the fire with a child's exercise-book in his hand.

"I found this in the bookcase. Some small chap copied it out. Listen.

"'I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my
love,'"

He had not got even that far when Kari, standing in the door, matched word for word with him.

"'The love that asks no question, the love that stands
the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best,
The love that never falters, the love that pays the
price,
The love that makes, undaunted, the final sacrifice.'"

She was pale when she came and sat by him. "I learned that at school. Kirk and I did. We used to say it over, riding along the valley, coming home from school, together, the way we did now."

She leaned against Jeff's shoulder and looked at the words written in a boy's round, careful writing.

"I can see them, all over the country, little boys learning that poem by heart. By heart, you understand. Letting it get into their blood-stream. Boys like Eric and Kirk. Like this youngster. Where is he now, I wonder? Grown-up? Dead?"

Jeff looked at her with serious, hard, gray eyes. "He may well be."

She turned fiercely to him. "Were they being prepared? Were they taught these poems so that they should one day be willing to go out and die? Were they being indoctrinated? Tell me that."

"I can't tell you, Kari. I don't know. Things being

as they are, wars will come. A man has to stand to, then. A country has to have men who are willing to stand to."

"Need things be as they are?"

"Till enough people really want to change them. Is there any more to the poem?"

"Yes."

She sat still for a while, then folded her hands in her lap and recited as she had once in a little school house on the edge of the Qu'Appelle valley.

"And there's another country, I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them
that know.

We may not count her armies, we may not see her
king.

Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering.
And soul by soul and silently, her shining bounds
increase,

And her ways are ways of gentleness and all her
paths are peace.'"

Jeffrey flicked his cigarette into the fire. "You have something there."

Kari frowned. "It's comforting. The words slip along soothingly. The trouble is, it's too soothing."

"Not necessarily." He broke off to smile at her. "We talk a lot, don't we? I never used to. That's what it is to be married. What I mean is, there is another country."

He leaned and put another log on the fire, and the flames curled up around it, and the birch bark bubbled and burst into bluish sparks.

"When I was a child, I used to spend my holidays

at my mother's home in Scotland. Once when I was about twelve I was in church on Sunday morning as usual. I can remember it very clearly as it was that day. The light coming in the tall, narrow windows, the hard pew where I sat with my prim spinster aunts, and in the pulpit the minister in his gown and bands. I can recall just one sentence in that or any of his sermons. He leaned over and it seemed that he looked straight at me and said as if it was important for me to know, 'Sit loose in the saddle to the things of time.'"

Kari was puzzled. "Does it mean, remember that other country all the time?"

"In a sense. It means, remember the timeless things and forget the things of time, money, comfort and so on. Sit loose. Relax. Take it easy, chum. Above all, cut loose from avarice and self-interest."

"A major operation," offered Kari drily. "What would you put in the place of self-interest?"

"Your fellow-men. God. A great idea. After all, no one is entirely given over to selfishness. And in so far as he is loosened from it, he is free, he is responsible, he is able to take what comes, because he is in touch with the timeless things. Gilbride, get a soap-box. Why don't you tell me to shut up?"

"Because I love you, darling. Let's ski over to Ste. Adele for lunch. We can go in to see Julie's father on the way."

But they were loath to move. Kari reached for an apple on the mantel and handed it to Jeff.

He pulled her into his arms and she lay back, looking up into his face. She raised herself and kissed him under the chin. "I wonder how many women have

done that? Life and love have been going on for a long time."

"Time," he repeated morosely. "Time is our enemy. It goes like lightning. But you and I here, this is timeless. This is forever. Do you know what I mean?"

"Not very well." Her voice was muffled against his chest. "Do you?"

"A little. I am trying to free you from the tyranny of time. Because one never knows what will happen. And we have this present moment as our permanent possession."

"I'll remember. Sit loose in the saddle to the things of time. Cling to life instead. And maybe to love."

"Right."

After a moment Kari said thoughtfully, "You know, as I was lying in bed this morning, I was thinking of the tens of thousands of boys from all over Canada who have been pouring into recruiting stations, voluntarily and of their own accord. And I thought too of the draft-dodgers who are said to be hiding in these Laurentian hills."

"Stout fellows."

"They think it isn't their war."

"A few Messerschmitts should come over."

"Probably they never learned 'I vow to thee, my country,' like Kirk did. And they're alive and he's dead."

"His cause lives."

"Well, anyway, as I lay in bed and looked at you, I could understand those girls who prefer a live lover to . . ."

"To a dead hero. I daresay they do. We are as we are."

She turned in his arms and clasped him fiercely.

"All I can say is, take care of yourself."

He smiled, that gentle, mirthless smile.

"I'll do that," he said.

"Liar," she mourned, and laid her cheek against his.

Chapter X

BRIGHT WINTER

THE fortnight came to an end. Jeff returned to St. John's and Kari to the florist's shop. She was absurdly lonely. Every minute of the day she missed Jeff. She came back to the apartment one noon hour, ostensibly on an errand, but really to see if a note from him had come in the morning's mail.

When she came in, her room was being cleaned. The charwoman stood on a step-ladder, polishing the top panes of the window. She was a big, well-developed coloured girl, and she made a startling figure, limned against the glass—bare brown shanks, scantily-covered torso, and her head wound about with a scarlet kerchief.

She waved her dust-cloth cheerfully. "Ma'am, I counted on you being out." With a last vigorous swipe she climbed down. "Heard you'd just been married." Her brown face shone with friendliness and perspiration. "I sho' do wish you luck."

"Thank you." Kari smiled at her. "You're new here, aren't you? I don't know your name."

"Amaryllis, ma'am. All named for flowers, we wus, and I'm the oldest, so I'm Amaryllis. Mawm had a list."

"Are you married, Amaryllis?"

"Well, in a manner of speaking, I am. Two or three times. The first one, he died. The next, he jes' lit out. The genelman I have now, I've been with four, five years. Only thing, he's bad when he's drunk. Except for that, he treats me swell."

She went down on her knees. "I sure do admire this floor, ma'am. Dark and beautiful, if you know what I mean."

Amaryllis herself was beautiful. A sculptor or a painter would think so. Polishing the floor, her great arms reached with sure, slow strength, with animal grace and power. A splotch of sweat stained her yellow blouse between the shoulder blades. She turned to smile up at Kari. She had thick lips, a spread nose and liquid, dark-brown eyes.

Later, from the bedroom, Kari could hear her singing softly to herself in a deep voice that was as smooth as molasses. Then she appeared in the doorway.

"Ma'am, I come every morning at eight-thirty. I was jes' thinkin' I could pop in here before I start to work, and if you wasn't feeling well, I could make a cup of tea for you while you was still in bed, before you raised yourself, you understand, ma'am."

Kari looked solemnly at her. "Now, Amaryllis," she said.

Rich, dark laughter bubbled. "Well, ma'am, it's happened before. And I wouldn't make the offer to many. But I was thinkin' as I was rubbin' up the floor, you talk to me as if I was a human bean, same

as yourself, even if my skin is black. Not that it is really, is it, ma'am? More a high brown."

"A nice, smooth brown."

"Thank you, ma'am. Well!" She picked up her pail and dusters. "Any time you'd like that cup of tea," and she took her departure grandly.

Time kept slipping by. In February the spring flowers began to come in. Daffodils bloomed, brave and chilly, behind windows white with frost. Pale green shoots, golden trumpets—they were beautiful, but they pointed to a spring that, for Kari, would come far too soon.

The door jangled open one day, and there stood Leone's friend, he of the Silver Shillings. Kari gave him the welcoming but impersonal smile that was standard equipment for serving the public. Today he was hard to please.

"What I'd really like is a dozen American Beauties. Now that *was* a rose. Stiff stem. Big. Fine colour."

"I know," she soothed. "They must have been wonderful. After the war, maybe. But the Token, for instance, is beautiful too. Or the white Killarneys. See the long elegant buds."

He looked at her with interest. "What would you choose?"

"The yellow Souvenirs or the Killarneys."

"Irish, are you?"

"Part."

He leaned over the counter. "Look, what about dinner with me some night?"

Was he planning to add her to his list? Leone and

the girl who liked Silver Shillings, and now her? Or was it just a vagrant, kindly impulse?

"But, Mr. Underwood, I'm married. You didn't know, of course." Her voice was full of her own delight and satisfaction in the fact.

He smiled benevolently at her. "Truly? Congratulations, and all that, my dear. Not that it cancels my invitation."

"It does for me, I'm afraid. But thank you. Shall it be the yellow roses, or the white?"

When he had gone, Beatrice said, "Was the perennial bachelor trying to date you?"

Kari nodded. "He didn't know about Jeff."

"I see. He's not just a playboy, you know. On the contrary, he's a top-flight business man. Inherited money and made a lot more. Textiles. Look, Kari, take home some of the yellow roses, in case Jeff comes."

When Kari came home that night, Martha Osburn was at the table in the hall where her father often sat. She was frowning as she tore a sheet of paper into strips and the strips into scraps. When she saw Kari she smiled and motioned her over. Kari sat down in one of the stiff-backed hall chairs, and looked curiously at the other.

"Martha doesn't like them pretty," her father had said of her. That was a libel, thought Kari. Martha had more on her mind than the prettiness of her tenants. She was a big woman, buxom of body, with a straightforward unhandsome face and a grip like a man.

She was embarrassed now. "I hope you don't mind that my father sits here so much."

"Not at all."

The other sighed gustily. "I won't pretend that my father is not a problem. He has been increasingly so, ever since my mother died. Lately he has taken to writing letters." She indicated the scraps of paper. "This, I rescued before he got it mailed."

She laughed shortly and sobered. "He has written other letters. It's extraordinary how much harm can be done by writing letters. Old age is a very tragic thing sometimes. We must have patience."

"Of course," agreed Kari politely.

She was sorry for Martha as she let herself into the apartment, then she forgot all about her, wondering if Jeff would come.

The bell sounded and she ran to open the door. But it was not Jeff who stood there. Instead, a stocky figure in khaki.

"Dan!" cried Kari in amazement and delight, and drew him within. "Dan Laurell!"

His face creased in the brief contortion of a smile she remembered so well.

"Where have you been, Dan?"

"Down in Georgia."

"Georgial!"

"Yes. Learning paratrooping."

"But why down there?"

"Co-operation among the armies. The Yanks are using Camp Shilo for some cold weather equipment tests. But we'll be in Manitoba again by April."

"When did you leave England?"

"Last fall. For this course. After, I'll be going back."

She looked thoughtfully at him. "Do you like the idea of that kind of fighting?"

"Well, I'm not bad with a gun. And I like to be on my own."

"Take care of yourself then," she said soberly, and thought immediately how ridiculous it was to say that to a soldier. Personal safety was the one thing they had to give up. It was quite a lot to ask of them too, come to think of it, when those who asked it, usually sat safe at home.

The door-bell whirred again. This time it was Jeff.

"I'm so glad," cried Kari, "that you came in time to meet Dan."

Later, Kari went to the kitchen to make coffee. She could hear from the next room Dan's deep rumble and Jeff's clear, clipped British voice. She remembered Dan's mother as she had so often seen her, hunched over the summer fire, and she thought of Jeff's home as he had described it. These two had come up from very different ways of life, but they had something in common now. Basically, perhaps they had a great deal in common.

Jeff set the tray on the gate-legged table, and she poured the coffee.

"After the war, we may be neighbours," she said. And to the question in Dan's eyes, "Jeff's home was bombed. He was at University when war broke out and never got started on a job. It's just possible we may come back to the valley."

"We'd all be glad."

"It sounds like quite a place," said Jeff.

"It is. Sort of free."

"So I gathered."

After Dan had left, Jeff opened his bag. "I brought some records."

"We'll light a fire and then play them."

Jeff laid the kindling and the charcoal in the tiny bedroom grate, and touched a match. "At last I'm getting some good out of this fireplace," he said. They took cushions from the sofa and sat on the floor in front of the small but vehement blaze.

"'Nocturne by Debussy.' Very melodic, as I remember it. Schubert's 'Unfinished Symphony.' Also a Gershwin."

"I had a letter from Cicely today," said Kari. "She makes me feel one of the family."

"You are."

"I know. But she gives me a good feeling. Halfrid had been there. They went dancing."

"Fine."

They had turned out the lights and pushed back the window drapes. It was snowing outside. Large, soft flakes flattened themselves on the panes, ran moistly together and slid down in streaks. Within was darkness and firelight and music.

"What does it make you think of?" asked Kari.

"Mum and Sunday nights at home, a thousand years ago. She liked Debussy."

Kari leaned against his shoulder. "You have a much more elegant background than I. I think my old home is wonderful, but that's probably because it is home."

"It may surprise you to know that to me your past is most romantic. One of my secret hopes has been



that I may get a leave long enough for us to fly out there."

"Jeff!" She sat up. "How I'd love it! Oh; Jeff!"

Next morning Kari woke to a lovely, leisurely Sunday. She also woke to music. Jeff had reached to turn the switch, and then watched till her eyes flew open and brightened into recognition and pleasure. It was the Nocturne.

"Our theme song," he smiled.

They lay luxuriously listening, when the bell sounded. Kari caught up a dressing-gown and went out.

It was Amaryllis. "Just me, honey. I left my red ear-ring yesterday."

"It's on the window-sill."

"Thanks, ma'am. Now let me get you a bite of breakfast while I'm here."

"Don't trouble, Amaryllis. My husband is with me."

"He is! You get right back in there, honey chile, and don't let me see hide or hair of you till I calls out, 'Breakfast is served, ma'am.'"

Laughing, Kari went back and closed the door. "Amaryllis is wonderful," she said.

"You're wonderful. Do you know that as you talked to her, there wasn't a note in your voice to indicate you were talking to a servant."

"Why should there be?"

"No reason. But there usually is. Even with the nicest people. Here as well as in England. Perhaps not in the West. That is one reason why I am intrigued by it."

"It's a big, empty place," said Kari thoughtfully.

"The most important thing in it is the weather. After

that, people. In the country, neighbours are very important. It doesn't matter if they're naturally congenial, or if you'd pick them for friends if you had a choice; they're there, and you've got to get along and help each other."

"Not a bad technique to learn, anywhere. It sounds very refreshing and practical to a cold-blooded Englishman."

She looked at him briefly out of the corner of her eye.

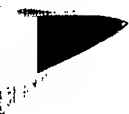
He laughed. "Perhaps cold isn't the word."

There was the clatter of a fork on the edge of a glass from without. "Breakfast is served, ma'am," came the dark, genial voice of Amaryllis.

When they came out she was gone, but the gate-legged table was pulled into the window alcove. Sunshine flooded it. On it were bacon and eggs, toast, coffee and marmalade.

"I told you she was wonderful," said Kari.

She leaned across the table to him, the sunlight bright on her hair, and her eyes enchanted. "I couldn't *be* any happier," she said.



Chapter XI

THE VALIANT AND THE VULNERABLE

THE weeks marched by. Easter came. The shop was full of lilies and daffodils, the churches were packed with eager and anxious worshippers, and the streets were bright with the Easter parade.

Never had the Easter flowers seemed so lovely to Kari. Nor the Easter music so heavenly. Never had life seemed so taut with joy. And never had joy been so perilously poised over, and so close to pain.

Beatrice looked at her in pity. Her face seemed luminous now as well as her hair. It was like alabaster with a light behind it.

"So young," thought Beatrice, "so valiant, and so vulnerable." No one knew better than she how shrewd were the blows that Fate delights to deal to the young, the valiant, and the vulnerable.

"Any time that Jeff is free, you take the day off," she told Kari. "We'll manage." She brushed aside Kari's thanks. "Did I tell you that Hank has leave of absence from the School Board, and is coming east to do personnel work in a war-plant?"

"Coming here?"

"Yes. He'll live with me."

"How splendid!" said Kari warmly, and thought for a little while what it would be like to have Hank near again. But, actually, nothing was very important to her now but Jeff, and the inexorable passing of time.

In the florist's shop it was marked off definitely by the kind of flowers on display. By the end of April, the lilies and daffodils had disappeared from the window and had given place to hydrangeas. Massed together, the big, soft-coloured blossoms were a billowy cushion of pale pink and heavenly blue and varying shades of purple.

One day Ben came staggering in from the back of the shop with an enormous plant. Five heavy snowballs of violet-coloured bloom that had to be propped up by bamboo supports. Julie and Kari walked around it, exclaiming over it. Then they petticoated it in silver paper, and tied it with narrow, shining ribbon.

"I hope that whoever gets it, appreciates it," said Kari.

Julie laughed. "Anyway, someone pays plenty for it."

That same day, just before closing, the door swung open and a sailor came in. He was young and thin, and his eyes were dark-circled. He walked straight over to Kari.

"I want to send some flowers. Three dollars is what I can spare."

Kari glanced quickly up into his young, harried face. "Give me the address, and then we'll look around."

He told her, and watched her as she wrote it down.

"My mother. She's not well. It's hell and all to leave her."

Then he saw the hydrangea. He put out a finger and touched one of the big, soft blossoms. His breath came heavily once.

"Like it?" asked Kari. "Would she?"

"Yes. But . . ." His eyes went in search of lesser blooms.

"Two-fifty will take it," said Kari softly.

"Sure?"

She nodded. "It will go out in the morning."

"Could it go tonight? She's feeling low, you understand."

"Tonight, then."

All at once he looked younger. "Gee, thanks," he said.

When the door had closed on him, Julie exclaimed, "Are you crazy? Two-fifty!"

"I'll make up the difference. I'm taking it out to his mother tonight. Want to come?"

"Sure. Will you lug that along on the bus?"

Kari laughed. "We'll take a taxi."

They found the address—a small flat, three floors up, very bare and very poor. And the woman in it bore the marks of illness and grief as well as poverty.

Julie carried the plant over to the table and unswathed it. In the indigent little room with the clean, faded furniture and the worn linoleum on the floor, the hydrangea was completely incongruous and even more lovely than it had been in the shop. Here it filled the room with its gracious and opulent presence.

"From your son," explained Kari cheerfully. "And the nicest in the store."

"From Tom," whispered the other in wonder and delight, then just as he had done, she put out a finger gently and touched the bloom.

On the way down the stair, Julie said fiercely, "The men that make wars!"

"Or poverty," thought Kari. Could it be that war and poverty had the same source?

Nevertheless, during the days that followed, whenever Kari thought of the hydrangea blooming away in that bare little room, she was glad.

Indeed, the whole world had never been so lovely to Kari as it was in that fleeting month of May. It seemed as if all her senses were heightened, were sharpened intolerably to colour and sound and feeling. The flowering trees, the young grass, the platoons of tulips in the park, surely they had this year a special radiance. They had, at any rate, the charm of impermanence. How soon they would fade, and Jeff be no longer here.

Martha Osburn said to her one day, "There's a nice little place at the back of the house. I've a bench beneath the lilacs. If you and your husband would like to sit there in the evenings . . ."

"How kind of you! We'd love it."

It was a secluded plot of green with a cedar hedge on one side and lilacs and honeysuckles on the other. Below lay the garden, now breaking into spring bloom. The air was full of the smell of flowers and of damp earth and of growth.

They sat there a long time one evening, till the sun went quite down, and a few stars began to prick out in the quiet dark blue sky.

Kari pulled down a branch of white lilac, held it against her cheek, and let it snap back. Her face was tremulous, her eyes kept meeting Jeff's and veering away. Then she sighed deeply and gave herself to him in a long, loving look. He came and sat by her on the bench and put his arm around her.

They sat still. It was as if all their lives had flowed into this moment, and they held it between them, precious, imperishable. Time ceased to be. There was just here and now, and it was forever. It was as if a firm hand held them and comforted them, as if a great mind told them, "This is the true reality. This is eternity. This is as you are."

Jeff cleared his throat. "A poet—Eliot, I think—writes of the 'point of intersection of the timeless with time'. Like now."

Kari nodded. This moment, queerly elongated as it was, queerly outside time, was healing. It calmed and steadied her. It was well that it did.

Jeff leaned and kissed her. "Kari," he said softly. "It has come. This is my last night."

Upstairs they talked of their plans.

He looked around the room, as if to fix it in his mind. "I'll like to think of you here."

"But just as soon as I can, I'll be in England, too."

He sighed. "My dear, it's not very safe. And you can hardly imagine the discomforts. Besides, if anything happened to me . . ."

She laid her hand over his mouth. "Think of your leaves. Of being together."

"I'm thinking. But you'll not make any effort to get passage till after the baby is born."

"As soon as he is old enough to travel, then."

"He?"

"Jeffrey Junior."

She lay staring into the dark. Was it her heart she heard beating, or his?

"What did that poet say?" she asked slowly.

"The point of intersection of the timeless with time."

"Yes. Time, stand still. Tomorrow never come."

But it came.

On their way to the railway station, the next afternoon, they waited on Peel Street to let a flight of air force men go by. They were a long, three-deep, swinging line. They sang as they marched,

"Bless them all, bless them all,
The long and the short and the tall."

They were young, smart and carefree. Eager and alert. The Number One crop of the country. Air crew.

Jeff stood on the walk beside Kari, but it seemed to her that he was in the parade, too. That a thousand Jeffs were stepping smartly by, on their way to death.

"Bless them all, bless them all," the voices of those far ahead floated back. The parade seemed unending—the thud of passing feet, the swing of arms, close-cropped boys' heads, straight boys' backs, passing, passing.

Her throat tightened and ached. Jeff held her arm firmly against him, and he gave her that sweet, unmirthful smile of his that accepted all the realities of the situation.

Kari said, in forced cheerfulness and in defiance of the same situation, "Tell Cicely to be on the lookout for a tiny flat for us."

He smiled again. "Perhaps I'll ship you up to Scotland to be with my aunts."

"But believe it, Jeff," she cried passionately. "Don't for one minute doubt it."

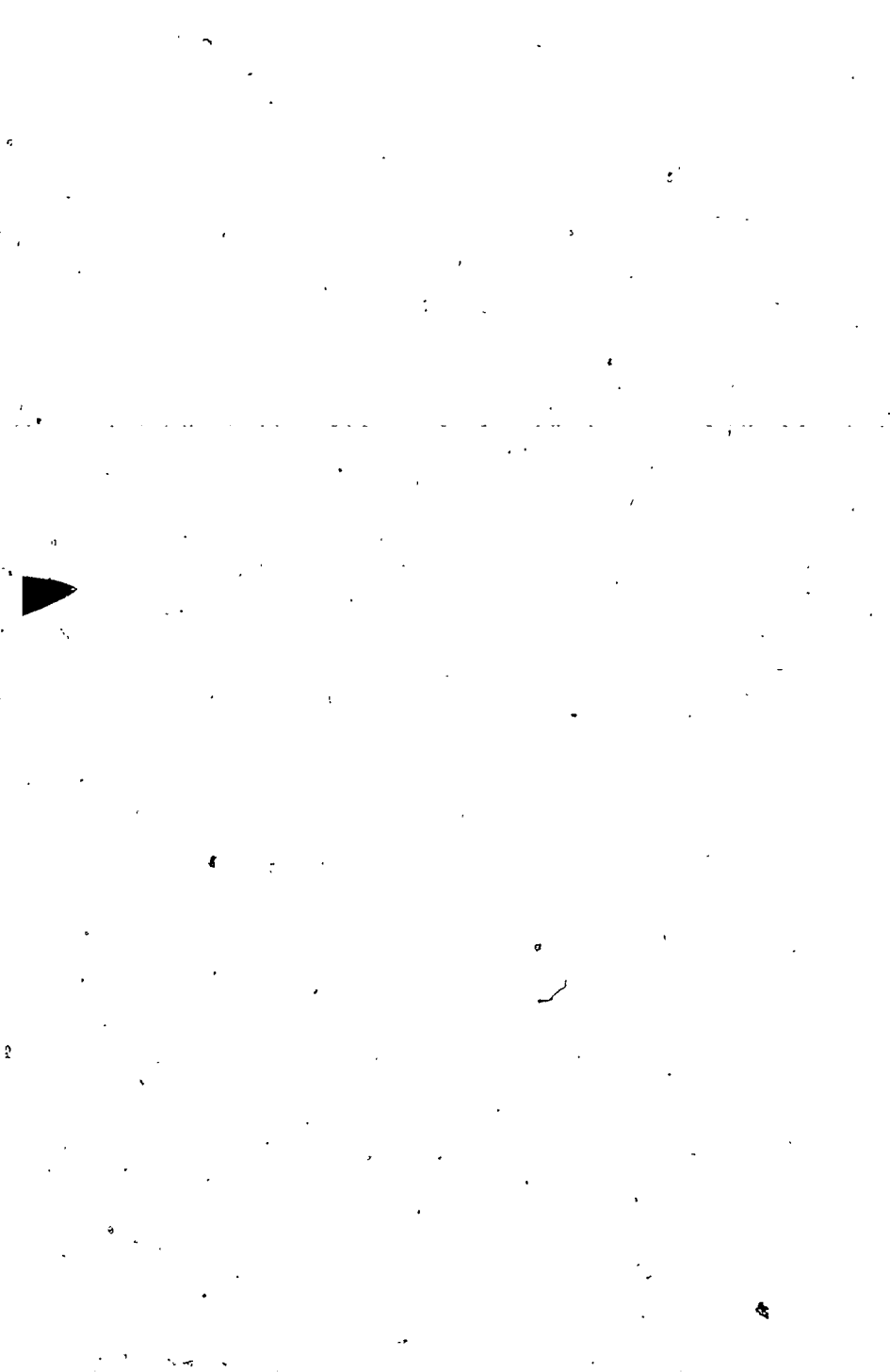
"Darling, I won't be crewed up for weeks."

"Will you tell me when you are?"

"You want me to?"

"Of course."

"Then I will."



Chapter XII

IN TWO WORLDS

KARI lived in two worlds after Jeff had gone, the familiar one of apartment, flower shop, Julie and Beatrice, and another world across the sea into which she projected herself. The one engrossed her days, into the other she retreated by night. Before she went to sleep, she listened to the news, and almost always, when the weather permitted, the non-committal voice of the announcer told her that the R.A.F. was over the continent.

So she lay in the dark and saw the planes going out—the night bombers, with the sunset behind them and before them the darkening skies of Europe. There they were, Lancasters, Wellingtons, Halifaxes, droning on through the darkness, and each followed by a flock of passionate petitions that were like small birds flying desperately against wind and distance to keep up, to guard and protect. Poor, passionate, praying next-of-kin! Poor fools! Could a fleet of bombers go out over Stettin, or Duisburg, or Cologne, and come back intact?

No, this Lancaster, that Halifax, these Wellingtons would not come back. Three or nine or nineteen or thirty-nine of our aircraft would be missing. But not Jeff. Kirk was gone. But not Jeff. "Take care of him, God. Of Jeffrey Gilbride, Flight-Lieutenant in the R.A.F. Born in London. Twenty-three years old. Have you got it, God?"

Her tears ran down her face and wet the pillow. There was a tightness in her chest, that never entirely left her.

Beatrice was good to her, and so was Julie. Leone remembered often to be kind. Sometimes she took her home with her, to her mother's, for tea or for dinner.

It was a conventional home. Mrs. Newell, resolutely young for her age, was, in appearance, a tribute to the skill of her dressmaker and her beauty-parlour. She was sweet to Kari, not as if she were particularly interested in her, but as if she owed it to herself to be sweet and kind to everyone. Mr. Newell was a silent man. Even his face was expressionless. His real life, thought Kari, is not here at all.

One night Leone came into Kari's apartment. "I want to ask a favour of you. I want you to call Hal Underwood and tell him I am ill."

"Are you?"

"No. I met a man. A sailor. You should see him. Hiram is his name, and he looks as if he might have been with Captain Kidd. But young." She bent over in silent laughter. "He's on leave. Two days."

"Why don't you tell Hal that because a friend is here on short leave, you'll have to break your date."

"It's not so simple," said Leone shortly.

"Sorry."

Leone regarded her thoughtfully. "You see, Hal's a very solid citizen. Some day I shall marry him. But not just yet. Meanwhile I can have a little diversion, can't I?"

She was amused by Kari's expression. "I bet you went to Sunday School when you were a kid."

"I bet you did, too."

"As a matter of fact, I did." She pressed out her cigarette. "And when I left home and took this apartment there was a major domestic upheaval. My mother bores me," she finished briefly.

At the door, she turned, with laughter in her eyes. She said, "Hiram is what is known in the navy as an able-bodied seaman. Wait till you see him."

Kari saw him the next day. He was stupendous. He was tall and he was heavy, and he had a great, curling black beard like an Assyrian. His eyes were a clear, unclouded blue, like a child's. His cheeks were pink with health, and gold hoops dangled from his ears.

Leone rather reluctantly introduced him at the door of her apartment. As he followed her in, he turned and gave Kari an ironical bright grin as if to say, "See what I fell into," and Kari smiled back.

It occurred to her that at sea, when time lagged in the corvette or the cruiser or wherever he was, the unbelievable Hiram would cheer his comrades with the story of his leave in Montreal. Not that it mattered. Leone would never know. Nor Hal.

Hal had been solicitous when she phoned about

Leone's illness. "Flowers? Have you something special?"

"Better drop in and see."

So the next day, he came.

"White stocks," he decided in his executive voice. "Perhaps the perfume is too heavy? I think not. I shall take them up myself."

"Well," demurred Kari, "you know how it is, with a bad cold. Eyes and nose."

He laughed. She could see he found it endearing in Leone that she did not want him to see her unlovely.

He sat down, smiling, to write a message. Then Hiram came sauntering in.

Julie hurried from the back of the store, but he waved her aside. He waited for Kari.

Hal handed her the card. "Tell Leone that if there's anything I can do. . . A bottle of wine?"

"She'll let you know, I'm sure," said Kari gently and found herself flushing under Hiram's steady gaze.

When the door closed, he lounged over.

"Leone. Not a common name. Sick?"

"The gentleman says so."

"I don't believe him." He laughed rollickingly, and the shop was for an instance startled into silence. Then he sobered. "I came for flowers, too. What'll I get?"

"Don't ask me," she said wearily. "Look around." Then she smiled. "Who are you, anyway?"

"I'm an Ancient Briton." His deep, rolling voice filled the room. "My mother is Cornish, and my father was a mountainy man from Wales."

"I think you're a buccaneer who has been asleep in a cave and just woke up to join the navy."

"Maybe I am. Now, what about me getting a pal for a foursome tonight?"

She looked up from her pad and answered him in his own language. "Listen, chum," she said softly. "I'm married."

"Not here, is he?"

"No. He's flying. And he's a good guy, and I'm waiting for him."

"Lucky stiff," he commented cheerfully.

She laughed. "See what you can find for Leone."

His choice surprised her. It would surprise Leone, too, she felt sure. Pink roses and forget-me-nots. He fingered them lovingly. "We had them in the garden at home. Make up a nice bouquet for me?"

"I will, Hiram. An elegant one."

She did, while he stalked, whistling, about the shop in his navy uniform, sloppy at the feet, tight as a girdle about the hips, and widening out across his enormous shoulders. Business was interrupted. Everyone turned to look at him. He was completely unselfconscious. He chucked the pansies under the chin, and buried his nose in a bowl of violets with loud sighs of delight.

Then he took the box of flowers under his arm, slapped down the money, gave Kari a bright, piratical grin and a half-salute, and was away. The shop seemed suddenly very quiet.

On Monday Kari said to Leone, "Your room must be like a bower."

"It is. But, my word, Hiram's an unpredictable lad. Who'd have thought he'd turn possessive? He chucked poor Hal's flowers down the garbage chute. Stinking

weeds, he called them. Then he said 'Why do we go to those piddling little cafés?' "

"Well, why?"

"Did I want to meet Hal? But last night he was all for the Ritz. And there was Hal in his favourite corner with that actress wench."

"Actress?"

"The little Theatre."

"What did you say?"

"That sick as I was, I had to do my duty by the Services."

Through the hot weeks of July, Amaryllis came in every morning to give Kari her cup of coffee in bed. When Kari tried to pay for the extra service, she waved the offer grandly aside.

"Jes' hand over any old cloes you don't aim on wearing any more. I notice that yellow sweater is getting mighty thin under the arms. When you're done with it, it would sure set me off. Tight, but what of it? And the black dress with the seagrams."

Kari laughed and promised the sweater and the dress with the sequins. Amaryllis' use of words delighted her. She tried to remember the best of them for her letters to Jeff. For instance, her comments on the war. "That Ribbonstrap," she'd mutter balefully. And "Joybells" was her lyrical rendering of "Goebbels." But there was nothing lyrical about her mental attitude to the Germans.

"I'd cut out their black hearts," she said once, her voice and eyes savage. She stood there by Kari's bed,

her face slack, her big body relaxed, and she was not Amaryllis any more, but a brooding black woman.

"Nothing but trouble in the world, ma'am. That debil I live with, he was drunk again. Sometimes I think I'll leave him. And then again, I think I won't."

She picked up the tray, and broke into one of her warm, rich smiles. The dark spirit had lifted. "Sure is a nice day, honey chile. You're looking chipper again. Nothing like a cup of cawfee."

In August, Hank MacAllister came to the city. He lived with Beatrice, occupying the room that had been Eric's. He was glad to get back to Montreal for many reasons, to get away from teaching for a few years, to be with Beatrice, and to feel he was pulling his weight in the war effort. Also, he was eager to see Kari. Beatrice had kept him informed about her, and he was prepared to find her matured and different, and perhaps less lovely than she had been.

Instead he found her more beautiful. Her thick hair fell like a heavy, pale gold curtain, her great eyes were dark-smudged and bluer than ever, and she had still that nobility of body that he remembered.

They sat in Beatrice's pleasant living-room on a Sunday afternoon. The windows were open but the breeze that came in was sultry and humid.

Kari laughed. "When Amaryllis arrived this morning, I said, 'Hot, isn't it?' and she said, 'Ridiklus, ma'am, that's what it is, ridiklus.' You should see my Amaryllis, Hank."

He looked at her with affection in his eyes, and with something more. Privately he was saying to himself,

"If anything happens to the Englishman, I'll marry her, if she'll have me. And the child? It will be Kari's child. Yes, I will." Then he became aware that she was asking him a question.

"Maisie? She's fine."

"And Barry? Still a conscientious objector?"

"Definitely. He's been in some sort of construction camp. On the Alaska Highway, I understand."

"Do you remember how we used to talk?"

Hank remembered. He also remembered that two of their number, Eric and Kirk—the best timber in the lot, except for Kari—were gone. "Franz is in Italy, I hear. He writes to one of the girls."

Kari smiled dreamily at Beatrice. "It seems a thousand years ago. We were so young."

Gus Johnson was still at St. John's. Regularly he came in to town to see Julie, but of late there were signs of strain between them.

The matter came up one night in Kari's apartment. The girls were knitting. Kari had just finished turning the heel of a sock, and could now talk. "How are you and Gus getting on?"

"Oh, *mon dieu*, not at all. He would be engage."

"Well?"

"Well for now. But once out of the air force, he goes back to that wild Montana."

"Why not?"

Julie's round chin set stubbornly. "How could I leave my family and my friends? What would I do in Montana?"

"What everyone else does."

For a while Julie knit in silence. "You do not understand. You are English, not Canadian."

"I *am* Canadian. I was born in Canada. It happens that by blood I am not English at all."

"English-speaking Canadian, then. You don't understand us, *les vrais Canadiens*. We are very fond of our families. We cannot be separated. That is why we do not go so well to war. Our mothers, they love their sons so much."

Kari moved restlessly. "You are making me angry," she said.

"Why?"

"Because you don't know what you're talking about. The rest of us love our sons and husbands, too. But we are citizens of a country, not just members of a tribe. I have often heard my grandfather talk of the Frog Lake Massacre. Quinn, the agent, was shot in the back by two Indians. He had a squaw wife. Some time later, the two Indians were on trial. Mrs. Quinn was brought in to identify them. It was at the old Dewdney Street office in Regina. The Commissioner sat behind his desk. Two Mounties were on guard. There were the Indians, manacled and defiant."

Kari forgot about Julie, as she reconstructed the scene.

"Mrs. Quinn was brought in. She was a stout Cree woman. The Commissioner said, 'Look at these men. Do you recognize them?' She looked. They waited. 'I never saw them before,' she said.

" 'You see,' said the Commissioner, telling my grandfather about it, 'these men belonged to the tribe. The man they murdered was only her husband.' "

Julie tossed her head. "I think she was right. *Absolument.*"

"Yes. Then that's what you are, too. First of all, a member of a tribe."

Now Julie, in her turn, was angry. Her needles flew.

"You say I don't know what I talk about. Well, neither do you. I am so very sick of how you English talk. I have heard it often. 'Oh, my dear, you must go down to the Bonsecours Market. Priceless! Quaint!' How is it quaint, I ask? Farmers who got up while everyone else slept, hitched up their waggons or backed out their trucks, and drove to town with the stuff they'd raised with sweat and swearing and hard work. *Mon dieu!* Men with worries. Men with mortgages and sick children. Quaint! Will you stop calling us quaint?"

"I haven't."

Julie went on fiercely. "I heard a woman call a wayside Calvary quaint. It was an old Calvary, a cross with a twisted iron Christ on it. There are not many of them now. The tourists, they do not like them. So the figures have been remove. Why? We know, we are taught by our Church which is old and wise and experienced, that to suffer is the most real thing in the world, and give it time, it comes to everybody. When it comes to some poor farm woman, there is that suffering One on the cross. She is not so alone. And she can look at it. She is not weak in the stomach."

"But what has that to do with Gus?"

"It has to do with this. I belong here, where I understand, and where I am understood. I don't want to go to Montana."

"Well, I wouldn't worry. If Gus only wants to marry you when and if he comes back."

Julie looked at her and then burst into tears. "You are heartless."

Kari came and sat by her and Julie buried her face in the other's shoulder. Then she blew her nose and took up her knitting again.

"We have insult' each other. So now we are friends again?"

"Of course we are."

Letters came regularly from Jeff. He was working steadily through his tour of operations. Then would come a long leave, and Kari hoped by that time to be in England. As soon as the baby was born in January, she would put her name down for transportation overseas as an R.A.F. wife.

Hank tried to make the time pass as pleasantly as possible for her. To her he was like a member of her family, a young uncle or an elder brother.

He took her home one cold night, saw her up to her rooms, and even built a fire in the little grate, before he took his leave. When he stepped out into the hall, there was the elderly landlord at his seat in the alcove. When he saw Hank he rubbed his hands together with a hard, rustling sound.

Startled, Hank stepped back into the apartment.

"He's the father of the lady who runs the place," explained Kari. "He was sick for a while, but is evidently better."

"Why is he skulking around at this hour?"

"Keeping an eye on the tenants."

"See that your door is locked, then."

Kari nodded, and Hank went out and down the stair, limping, in spite of his best efforts, while the elderly guardian of morals watched him thoughtfully, still rubbing his dry old hands.

The next evening Kari was late coming home from work. She walked slowly up the hill and along Pine Avenue, so engrossed in her thoughts that it was some time before she heard a small wailing sound behind her.

It was a kitten. Kari stopped and it stumbled unsteadily toward her and pressed against her feet. She reached down for it. It was, perhaps, a month old, and thin. Its black fur was rough and dirty. But it cocked its head up at her and purred hoarsely.

"It has a cold, the poor mite." She slipped it into the pocket of her fur coat, and went on home.

Her door was ajar. That was strange. She pushed it wider. There, bending over her desk was the old man, Osburn. He twisted around and saw her.

"What are you looking for?" she demanded.

"Your husband's address, my dear."

"Why?"

"Come now, we should all write to the boys overseas."

"How did you get in?"

He smiled and held up a master-key.

"Don't do it again," she told him furiously, and held the door wide. He looked at her, and then scuttled through it.

She stood for a moment, frowning. Should she report this to his daughter, Martha? She shrank from the unpleasantness of it. And she liked Martha.

Then she remembered the kitten. It had gone to sleep in her pocket, but it wakened and looked up at her with a cheerful gamin grin. She laid it on a cushion and warmed some milk for it.

Then she made a suds in the bathroom bowl and dipped and rinsed and wrapped the small slippery body in a warm bath-towel. She was amazed to see how trustfully it submitted.

Perhaps Julie's cousin, the boy musician, would like it. The bath had vastly improved it. The black fur was silky now and the blue eyes bright and companionable. The tip of a red tongue showed. And it had a deep, businesslike purr. Kari named it Clootie, after a kitten she had as a child.

When Julie saw it, she was sure young Henri would love it, so engaging and frolicsome it had become. But Henri never got Clootie.

Kari opened her door one night, and the kitten, avoiding her restraining hand, shot out into the hall. Old Mr. Osburn was in his usual place, and Clootie with a little, galloping trot ambled over to him.

"Get it away," screamed the old man, but Clootie leaped up on his knee and clung with small, sharp claws. And at once began to purr loudly and placatingly. But a skinny old hand reached out and clutched and flung it viciously against the wall.

Kari ran and picked it up. It shuddered convulsively twice, and died.

With the kitten's limp little body in her hands, Kari advanced on the cowering figure in the chair.

"Keep it away, keep it away," he babbled, pressing himself against the back of the chair.

Kari stopped. She was revolted as at a spider or a slug. All of a sudden this senile man-creature seemed a cumberer of the earth, a piece of refuse that should have been disposed of, long ago. He sickened her.

She turned and walked into her room.

Chapter XIII

WHO FLY BY NIGHT

ON the night of the seventeenth of December, it was dark over Europe. Stars spangled the cold upper heaven, but there was no bomber's moon. Yet the bombers were out—Wellingtons, Halifaxes, Lancasters, on their way to Dusseldorf and points east.

Jeff piloted a Lancaster. He felt a satisfaction in that. There was a reliableness, a reasonableness about the big kite that was like a good woman. She was no streamlined beauty to be sure, and there was very little protection in her, except in her manœuvrability, but many a time she had roared on home and set them down in safety when a lesser craft would have broken up. So the men who flew her loved her.

The men who flew her, Jeff thought of his crew, man by man. The tail-gunner in his lonely turret, the bomb-aimer, the engineer, the wireless man, the mid-upper gunner and the navigator at his table. Especially did he think of his navigator.

Ron was a Canadian. That was why Jeff was first drawn to him. But he was not at all like Kari. He

was more like Jeff himself. In fact, there was a subtle sameness about all of them. They were air-crew type, slender, nervy, young. The whistles they wore on their collars gave them a still younger boy-scout look, though those whistles had a grim significance. Ditched, they might by them find each other in the dark.

Ron was a first-class navigator, top man on the station, as a matter of fact. You could count on him to set you down on the target smack on the E.T.A., or a few seconds before. In a tight spot there was something strengthening about him, about that cool, cheerful smile, the blue eyes so candid and resolute. Very straightforward, very Canadian.

Jeff picked up the inter-com.

"Pilot to Navigator. How are we coming, Ron?"

"Right on the dot. Took an astro-fix."

"Fine."

That was the worst about being a navigator. The poor bloke had to work all the way to target and all the way back. While he for long stretches could fly automatically. As now.

So he thought of Kari. She was always waiting for him around a corner in his mind. In a few months, with luck, they would be together.

Luck! His face sobered. What if his was all used up? The law of averages was against him. He slipped into prayer. "God," he said silently, "if You can see Your way clear, I'd like to get back from this trip, and from the few remaining. I realize the situation but . . ."

He left it at that, then added a postscript. "Anyway, help us to lay it on the button tonight, so we won't have to come back here any more."

Perhaps he shouldn't have married Kari. But they loved each other so. He took a long breath.

Lord, how lucky were those chaps, ten or twelve years his senior, who could love and marry at will. Not that they had valued the privilege. It had been a restless, divorce-ridden age. Now all he asked was a future, and Kari in it.

When a man was on Ops. the beauty of the world got him by the throat. Tonight's sunset, for instance, when they were coming out in the truck. The clouds piled high, gold and amber, cirro-cumulus they were, and the yellow stars pricking out in the dark sky to the east. Rather a mess man had made of a superb set-up. Even with all his rules, his thou-shalt-nots. Perhaps there were too many. Perhaps life should be more easy, more casual, more enjoyed. That's the way he always felt at this stage of the journey, when in a half-hour or so, he might still be alive and he might not be.

"Love God and your neighbour," Christ had said. Check your attitudes by the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, and then go ahead and enjoy yourself, revising your laws and customs as the times demand. That rather covered the case.

He wished he had put that in the letter he had written to Kari. He would, when he got back.

His mind leaped to another letter, and his face changed. The doddering old devil that wrote him about Kari's evening callers! Why shouldn't Beatrice's brother take her home and come in after, if he liked? Just the same, triple-damn the malicious fool who wrote

to tell him of it. The sooner Kari was over in England the better.

He put the incident resolutely out of his mind. He had now just a little while to think of Kari, before he shut down the curtain on everything but the present.

He remembered her in detail, her pale gold hair, her wide, friendly, passionate, blue eyes, the contour of forehead, nose and chin; her slim, straight, rounded body. Remembering, he flushed with love and longing. God, he groaned silently. Kari, Karil

Then suddenly he was thinking of Derek, his brother. It made him uneasy. Twice before on a bad run he had been conscious of Derek. Questions formed uncertainly in his mind. No answer came. Just a presence, friendly, comforting.

The inter-com. spoke. "Navigator to pilot. I'll check now."

"Right."

Then Jeff spoke to the crew, one by one. Their voices came back, tense, keyed up. The team was in good form, clicking like one brain. The past was cut clean away. Home, love, friends, all wiped out. Every man was only his present.

Came from Ron, "We're ahead of E.T.A. Got to stooge around."

"Right."

The target was lit up. It blazed with big, orange-coloured sunbursts, and smaller constellations were breaking out everywhere. The air was full of the long, white pencillings of tracers. Searchlights pointed and arched like swords at a military wedding.

"Here we go."

And now time stretched out like an elastic web. Minutes seemed aeons long, so naked they were in that blinding glare.

Then, "Bombs away," and the plane leaped like an elevator in its sudden lightening. They swooped on out of the brightness and fury into the welcome dark.

But a beam caught them. It held, it impaled them. Others swung in and converged on them. They were coned. The light blinded them. Literally. The plane jerked. Jeff was spun round by the impact and his left arm went numb. Flames leaped somewhere behind him. He gripped the wheel. They began to climb. Out and up into the darkness.

Ron appeared at his elbow. "Okay?"

"Yes. The fire?"

"I put it out."

"Good show."

"The tail-gunner's bought it."

"Damn! Any hope?"

"None. How are you?"

"My arm. That's all."

The blood dripped soggily. His shoulder ached. But he was quite able to carry on. With Ron to help.

It was then that the night-fighter came in.

The tail-gunner might have got him, had he been alive. The mid-gunner saw him a split-second too late. He got in his burst. It caught the ammunition. There was a considerable explosion.

The inter-com. was dead. The engines sputtered. A wing-tip broke and fluttered away. The plane was out of control.

Ron bent over Jeff, peering at him.

Said Jeff thickly, "Bail out."

"You, too."

"The others?"

"Gone. Your chute?"

"Can't see."

Ron clipped the chute on him. He fixed his hand on the rip-cord too, and in that last second of time, "I'll try to keep in touch," he said.

Meanwhile a great flaming beacon that had been a Lancaster bomber roared on down in a wide trajectory. Jeff neither saw nor heard it. He knew, by the jerk, that the chute had opened, but that was the last he knew. Long before he came to earth, he had lost consciousness, and as he drifted down, he hung heavy in the straps.

Part Three

KARI





Chapter XIV

THE MAP ON THE WALL

ON a snowy morning in the week before Christmas, Kari was dressed and ready to go out, when the door-bell sounded. A messenger boy stood there with a yellow envelope in his hand. She signed and took it, and he stamped down the stair, whistling.

She stood, holding the envelope. After a while she put her finger in the flap, and took out and read the message. Then with a quick, furtive movement she slipped it into the pocket of her coat.

She looked back over her shoulder into the room. It seemed unfamiliar now, even inimical. Her heart began to beat confusedly and her hands were shaking.

An impulse for flight seized her. The floor heaved and settled and rose again as she crossed the hall. Weakness bent her knees. Her throat tightened. But she reached the stair. And fell headlong down the long flight to the landing.

She lay for a minute, a pain in her side stabbing her. Then she got to her feet. As she gathered her coat about her, she felt the crackle of paper in her pocket,

and her throat closed spasmodically again. She held carefully to the rail as she took the rest of the stair, and came out into the cold morning.

Snow was falling softly in little spangly flakes that lay like small medallions on her dark coat and on her hair before they melted. But she was not aware of the snow. Her steps echoed to a rhythm, "Not Jeff, not Jeff, not Jeff!"

She walked rapidly down the hill, crossed Sherbrooke, and finally turned along St. Catherine's. The streets were full of people about their Christmas shopping. She was jostled. She walked faster and faster. She was running away. But the paper crackled in her pocket, when her arm swung against it.

Tears began to slip down her cheeks. People turned to stare. At the crossings she ignored traffic lights. Brakes screamed. Drivers called raucously after her.

Her side hurt, like a knife edging in. Her tears were turning to sobs. "Jeff, Jeff." She began to say it aloud. She began to run too, dodging the people, hurrying, her coat swinging wide.

Someone caught her by the arm. A large, fur-coated woman. Kari pulled away, but the stranger held her firmly, and led her to a parked car.

"Get in, now, dearie." Her voice was kind, but commanding.

Obediently, Kari got in.

At the house on Pine Avenue, the woman came up the stair and into Kari's apartment with her. "I'll get you to bed," she said.

"Why?"

"Because you're ill, aren't you?"

Kari shook her head. She drew the telegram slowly out of her pocket and handed it over.

The kind, dark face crumpled. "Ach, we who have had the telegrams." She was silent for a moment, looking at Kari. "But bed's the place for you, child. Truly it is."

Like a child, Kari obeyed. She was shivering spasmodically, but she was hardly conscious of it. Only a lost and infinitely lonely voice wailed within her ceaselessly, "Oh, Jeff, where are you? Where are you, Jeff?"

A hot-water bottle was slipped in at her feet, and the covers tucked well about her. Strong, motherly arms gathered her in for a moment, and a kiss was laid on her forehead.

Kari looked at her, her eyes really focusing on her for the first time. "Who are you?" she asked.

"A Good Samaritan, my dear. A good Jew, rather, if you think there are any."

"Of course I do. You're very kind. Will you 'phone for me?"

"Mrs. Blair will be here," said the stranger presently, coming back into the room.

When Beatrice arrived, the Good Samaritan took her leave. Kari was now in pain.

Grimly Beatrice 'phoned the doctor. By noon Kari was in the hospital. By nightfall, her baby was born, dead.

Through the long hours, Beatrice sat by her, reaching out occasionally to lay a firm hand on hers. Kari said once, staring at her out of her enormous, black-shadowed eyes, "If I were sure, I think I could let go."

"Nonsense," said Beatrice brusquely. "You couldn't. You're much too healthy."

While she was still in the hospital, Hank brought her a cactus plant in bloom. It reminded him, he said, of the wild cacti that grew on the high, dry ridge of land beside Last Mountain Lake in Saskatchewan.

"Remember the big pelicans that used to come winging over the lake in the morning?"

"And the gulls."

"Remember the float, and the diving tower?"

"And Kirk diving." She lifted herself on one elbow.

"I'm not giving Jeff up. Alive or dead, I'm holding on to him. I let Kirk go too easily. But not Jeff."

"You may get word at any minute."

"I may never get any word at all. But I'll find him." She lay flat and stared at the ceiling. "And I won't wait till the end of my life for it either."

He looked uneasily at her, and said nothing.

In a week she was back in her own apartment. Beatrice stayed with her for a few days, and after that, Leone took charge.

She said, "I won't bother you by sitting around looking at you. But tap on the wall if you need me. And I'll see to your provisioning in my own inadequate way."

"Please don't trouble."

Leone shrugged. "If I don't, Hal will probably come charging up here with a chicken and a bottle of wine. He has you on his mind."

The first morning she was back, Amaryllis came in. She worked away in the kitchen in an unnatural

silence, and then brought in a tray, and put it down beside Kari. She stood for a moment, looking at her.

"Ma'am," she said. "So you got trouble."

Kari nodded.

"Your husband missing. Your little chile daid. Yes, ma'am."

"Isn't it enough?"

"Ma'am," came the level, soft, deep voice, "you don't know what trouble is. What if you was born black?"

Kari stared. "Is it so bad?" she asked in a whisper.

"It's bad," said Amaryllis sombrely. Then her mood shifted. "Eat up your breakfast now, honey chile. It don't do no good to brood."

Olaf Andreson flew down from the Qu'Appelle. Kari had not been able, for a week or so, to bring herself to write her parents that Jeff was missing, and that she had been ill. When she did so, Olaf came at once by air.

He helped Kari through those first, frantic weeks of waiting.

"I wish I had seen Jeff before he went over," he said one day. "Tell me of him."

"Well, he has brown hair. Has. Had. Odd how queer tenses are in a case like this."

"Has."

"All right. He has brown hair, soft, straight, brushed back. Gray eyes. One has a little fleck of green in it. And there's his smile, sweet and sort of sad. Hard and gentle, all at once."

"I know." He got up and walked to the window. "I like looking down like this. It reminds me of when

I was a boy in Norway." He was silent for a while, then he sighed heavily. "The wheel of events swings round. When I left Norway I didn't think that in forty years a son of mine would come back to die in the Oslo fjord. And now, you and Jeff."

She looked enquiringly at him.

"During the last war, I knew an English girl. I was very much in love with her. But she died. I have never forgotten how I felt standing by her grave. It was raining. But after a while life went on. Yours will too, whatever happens."

"Poor Dad," said Kari softly, seeing him young, and by that English grave, and it raining.

Then Olaf said cheerfully, "Do you think Jeff would like living in the valley?"

"We thought we'd decide after the war."

Olaf drew an unsteady breath, and passed his hand down over his face. Kari knew of what he was thinking. Children again in the big house. Another Kirk.

She laughed softly with a catch in her throat. "Take care of Barney and Babe. We may need them."

Olaf smiled. "I meant to tell you. An old Indian on the reserve called that little ledge where you and Kirk used to play, the Place of the Children. I asked him why. He said that a long time ago a group of boys were practising with their bows and arrows there, when a war-party of Sioux came over the lip of the hill. One of the youngsters ran to warn the camp, but an arrow stopped him. The rest shot it out. They held for quite a while too. Long enough for the Stoneys down in the valley to get ready. They let the boys take it. There was nothing else they could do. But one mother ran

out towards them. She almost made it. The Sioux seemed of two minds. They stood and watched her. Then a brave let fly an arrow. The boys, of course, were all killed. But they saved the tribe."

They sat still for a while, thinking of that bloody scene of long ago. Kari thought, they let the boys take it. They're still doing that, in all the tribes in the world. Letting the boys take it.

Olaf was a quiet man. He had leaned on silence and looked out over wide spaces and had made his peace with life. But there was, nevertheless, a deep, explosive core of violence in him.

He asked Kari, "Who is the old man in the hall?"

"The landlady's father. Once I found him in my room looking at my mail."

"You did! How did he get in?"

"He had a master-key."

Olaf's teeth clenched on his pipe. Then in two long strides he was at the door and out of it. There sat the elderly Osburn, scratching and jabbing with his pen and cackling to himself as he wrote. Suddenly Olaf loomed over him. Hard fingers dug into his skinny shoulders. His old head jerked back, and Olaf's blue eyes glared icily into his.

"Keep out of my daughter's room," he hissed, "or,"—he picked up the pen and snapped it—"I'll break your neck like that. By God, I'll do it anyway." His fingers jabbed and probed. Tears gathered in the rheumy eyes. The old face twisted and quivered.

Olaf recoiled. He straightened, and rubbed his hands on the sides of his trousers, and came back into Kari's room.

"I think he'll let you alone now." His voice was mild again. "Just in case, I'll get you a Yale lock."

Kari laughed softly. Something violent in her vibrated to the same thing in her father. She felt the tug of kinship.

A few days after Olaf left, Amaryllis came in, as usual, to do the cleaning.

"Ma'am," she said, running the hot water into her pail till the suds billowed over. "I've been that mad."

"What happened?"

"Well, you know, honey, I always come to work looking good. F'rinstance, this morning I wore that yellow sweater and a new hat. You should see it. Green with a gold feather sweeping from here to here. Elegant. Got it at a rummage sale. Now, Miss Osburn gives me the use of a little room in the basement. I change there. I have a box for my clo's and my street jewelry."

She got down to wash the bathroom floor, then sat back on her heels. "Well, down in that little room I was changin' myself, and who comes snoopin' around but Old Nosey? I jes' goes on singin' to myself and not lettin' on I see him till he comes real close. The door don't close good, you see. Then I reached and made a grab for him. Yep. Just an old, dried-up bag of bones, he is. I laid him over my knee, and I took the flat of my hand to him. Good.

"He yelled, and I yelled back at him. He called me a so-and-so black savage. I says 'I'm part Injun too. Watch out I don't sculp you.'"

"Are you?"

"What?"

"Part Indian."

"Oh, Mawm used to say there was a dash of Cherokee. Anyway, His Nibs won't be sitting easy for a day or two." She laughed, and a swipe of her brush sent the soapy water swishing over the tile.

"Do you think he will tell his daughter?"

"Can't help it if he does. My heart sure goes out to her. And not a man of her own to comfort her, either."

"Nor have I," thought Kari bleakly.

In after years, when she looked back on that period of her life, she remembered nothing but waiting. For a cable, a letter, or a 'phone call. When she came home in the evening, by an act of will, she forced herself to look calmly and deliberately in the mail-box, without letting the sick fear within her rise to the surface. When the door-bell or the 'phone rang, she took a long breath and steadied herself before answering. She lived as much as possible on the surface of her mind, looking warily, out of the corner of her eye, as it were, at the dread that stalked her.

In February Julie invited her to a Sunday dinner at her uncle's comfortable, crowded, big house overlooking Parc Lafontaine. Twelve sat down to the table that day, Madame, a pale, benign woman, at one end of it, and at the other, M^{rs}ieu the host, rotund and jolly. He had brown, sparkling eyes and a luxuriant upturned moustache, and he was full of gay quips and jests as he carved pink slices from the sugar-coated ham.

Conversation flashed back and forth, bright and ejaculatory. It was for the most part in French, but

from time to time they turned to English, in deference to Kari who was learning French, but was not yet equal to such brisk interchange.

The bay window of the dining-room faced the east, and here Madame had her house-plants. Fuchsias with pendant, bright bubbles of bloom, begonias with hairy, red-stemmed leaves as big as plates, and ivy trailing to the floor.

She smiled at Kari's admiration. "They are my 'obby. I shall set out some slips for you in small pots. It is very comforting to watch even a geranium grow."

Henri sat beside Kari. "Will you play for me?" she asked.

"In the evening. This afternoon I shall show you what I build."

"Build?"

Young Bernadette, across the table, took it up. "He builds a big plane. And ships. He will not let me in. *Il ferme la porte*. Also lock it."

Kari laughed. Bernadette was round as an apple, and as red-cheeked, and was her father's special pride. He said, introducing her, "This is our youngest. When we saw her, we said, 'We can do no better than this. Full stop. Period!' Anyway we had twelve."

Madame looked indulgently at Henri. "*Oui*, he builds. It is his 'obby. *Certainement* the door is locked."

It was a small basement room where Henri built. Kari felt a nostalgic pang when she saw the model planes hanging by threads from the ceiling; the balsa, the dope, and the shavings. She touched a blue and silver Super-marine.

"I made one of these. My brother and I did."

"*Vraiment?*"

She sat down opposite Henri. The frame of a four-foot wing was tacked to the table. "Let me help."

With a small knife made out of a razor-blade, she sliced balsa and cut struts to measure. Henri anxiously consulted a blue-print. "Now this small . . . Oh, *mon dieu!*"

The glue bottle tipped. Kari sprang back but she was spattered. "It's nothing," she said. "When my brother and I had measles, we worked on trays across our knees. We had balsa chips in the bed all the time, and we got glue on the blankets."

Henri's little voice was shrill with laughter and excitement. "Now the tissue and then the dope. Some day we shall fly it. Will you come then and help me?"

She nodded, smiling.

Later, Henri played for her, in the twilight, sitting on the piano bench with his short legs dangling, while the rest listened in pride and family affection. It had been a pleasant day for Kari. They were good, kind people. But they had nothing to do with her real life. Her real life was on another plane. It was in a world made up of those who had got the telegram.

Hank told her one day, "Franz is gone."

She looked dumbly at him. Then, "Remember?" she said, thinking of school and the fencing club and an evening at Maisie's.

"I remember," answered Hank heavily.

This was 1944, the year of casualties. The war had never seemed so grim, so unending.

Said Julie one day in a small voice, "We are engage, Gus and I. My friends say I am crazy. Maybe I am. An American. A Protestant. A Lutheran, even." She shuddered. "The very name!"

"Poor Julie," said Kari.

"Yes. The trouble I have! I am a good daughter of the Church. But Gus says to me 'Promise now; that I'll bring up my children R.C.'s? What do you think I am?' Then he looks hard at me and says, 'Julie, this is a straight proposition. Take it or leave it. But no strings.' I wonder is there perhaps a girl in Montana?"

"I've no idea."

"Well, if it's take it or leave it, I take it. And let tomorrow look after itself."

"I hope there'll be a million tomorrows for you both."

"Ah, *misère!*" Julie pressed her cheek against Kari's shoulder. "I am so sorry. And you so brave. I think all the time it may be over before my Gus gets there."

"We'll hope so." She thought, if they invade soon, France and Belgium will be opened up, and airmen in hiding will be found, and perhaps, Oh perhaps . . .

She had a large map tacked up on her wall. The area between the coast and Dusseldorf was as familiar now as the palm of her hand.

The intensity of the air raids was increasing. The casualty lists were lengthening. Every night the papers carried pictures of young Canadians who would not be coming home. Sometimes the cumulative weight of anxiety and dread seemed too much to be borne. Any

happiness that could be snatched from this morass of suffering, let it be snatched.

Júlie and Gus were married on a day in May and went to the log house in the Laurentians for their honeymoon.



Chapter XV

THE LETTER

THE first week in June, a letter came from the padre of a bomber station in England. Enclosed with it was an envelope addressed to her in Jeff's familiar hand.

Wrote the padre:

"Jeff gave me this letter and asked me to send it to you if he were killed, or if missing, after five months had elapsed. So I am now sending it. My deep sympathy goes along with it, and my prayers, and my fervent hope that he may yet be found."

She read no more. Jeff's letter she smoothed out slowly with her fingers. The last hand to touch these folded pages had been his.

"Dearest Kari,—

"I hope that you will never see this letter, but I am writing it because I know that perhaps you will. The other day I read an article in a magazine, balancing up our loss and gain in heavy bombing.

They calculated the life of a Lancaster as twenty missions. Naturally that doesn't mean that after twenty trips you're out, but it does mean that this is a hazardous business. It's like our tail-gunner said the other night after a shaky-do. 'You know,' he said in a mild, surprised sort of voice over the intercom., 'this is damn' dangerous.' It seemed an understatement. So I'm writing to you now, my dearest, while I can.

"During the months we had together, we got into the habit of talking things over. I am doing that now, at my leisure.

"First, I want to tell you that you are the very best thing that ever happened to me. To think of you fills me with delight. You are a heady joy, even three thousand miles away. My very dear, thank you for that. And thank you for our child you are nourishing.

"We are now getting into our stride over here. By next spring our striking force should be enormous. We are doing our best. We are destroying that which ought to be destroyed. Yet I cannot help feeling that it is a great pity that this war was ever allowed to happen. We, who have been so inconvenienced by it, have surely a right to that opinion. Was it Kant who said that even a race of devils, provided only that they were intelligent, would be forced to find a solution other than war?

"Of course, at the last moment, there was nothing else to do. The Nazis had to be slapped down. The thing is to be sure that it doesn't happen again.

"The winning of the war will not solve all our problems. The obstructions will be cleared away, that's all, and we'll be given a new chance at them. Those who are reasonably young must be willing to tackle those problems. Because the old become

incapable of change. That is sad, but true. Our generation, then, must take the initiative. If you get this letter, I probably won't be back. That is where you come in.

"There are a few things that seem quite important to me.

"First, love of country is not enough. All our petty patriotisms must be fitted into a bigger pattern. Also, we who have, must be willing to give up some of what we have. That requires a measure of unselfishness. Now, the returned men will, all of them, be conditioned to a more or less sacrificial point of view. We are ready to be bumped off. Not if we can help it, of course, but—well, there are those empty places every day in the mess. If that shifting of self-interest can somehow be retained and carried over into peace, it will help.

"Do you remember the night, in that high and lovely apartment of yours that I can see in my thoughts so clearly, when you asked me what we were fighting for? Well, I know now. The brotherhood of man, which pre-supposes the Fatherhood of God. That and the Nazi idea, being, of course, unalterably opposed.

"In the presence of death, we are all brothers, I find.

"I have lived for some years close to the thought and fact of death. You will have to grapple with it now. You did, after Kirk went, but you did not, I think, carry all the way through.

"Accept it, for yourself, and for others. Don't be afraid. Believe me, the acceptance of the thought of death is a releasing experience. Things fall into focus. One doesn't grasp or clutch so much. A sweetness and a directness come into life. A freedom. A wisdom.

"So, accept the thought of death, and then go on to live as richly and adventurously as you can, holding fast to the things that death cannot touch.

"I suppose I am a religious type, though I was unaware of it before the war. And you cannot explain religion. It belongs in the realm of mystery, and in its essence has to be grasped intuitively with the higher reaches of the mind. As Pascal says, above the order of reason there emerges at the level of faith, a new order.

"Anyway, I am sure that I do not always ride alone in the plane. And I don't mean the crew. I mean that our three-dimensional life is not all there is to it. That is a comfort to me. I hope my firm belief in it will be a comfort to you.

"If I go down, it will probably be at the hands of German night-fighters. I have no hate in my heart for them. They're good flyers, the Jerries. They often do us in. But I have a great hot anger against the German people as a whole, and against the general slackness of mind on our part, that brought on the war.

"Because, of course, I want to live. Mostly for you, Kari. I want our life together, and I cannot bear to think of you in grief. So do not grieve, my Kari. I think I shall not be far away.

Your Jeff."

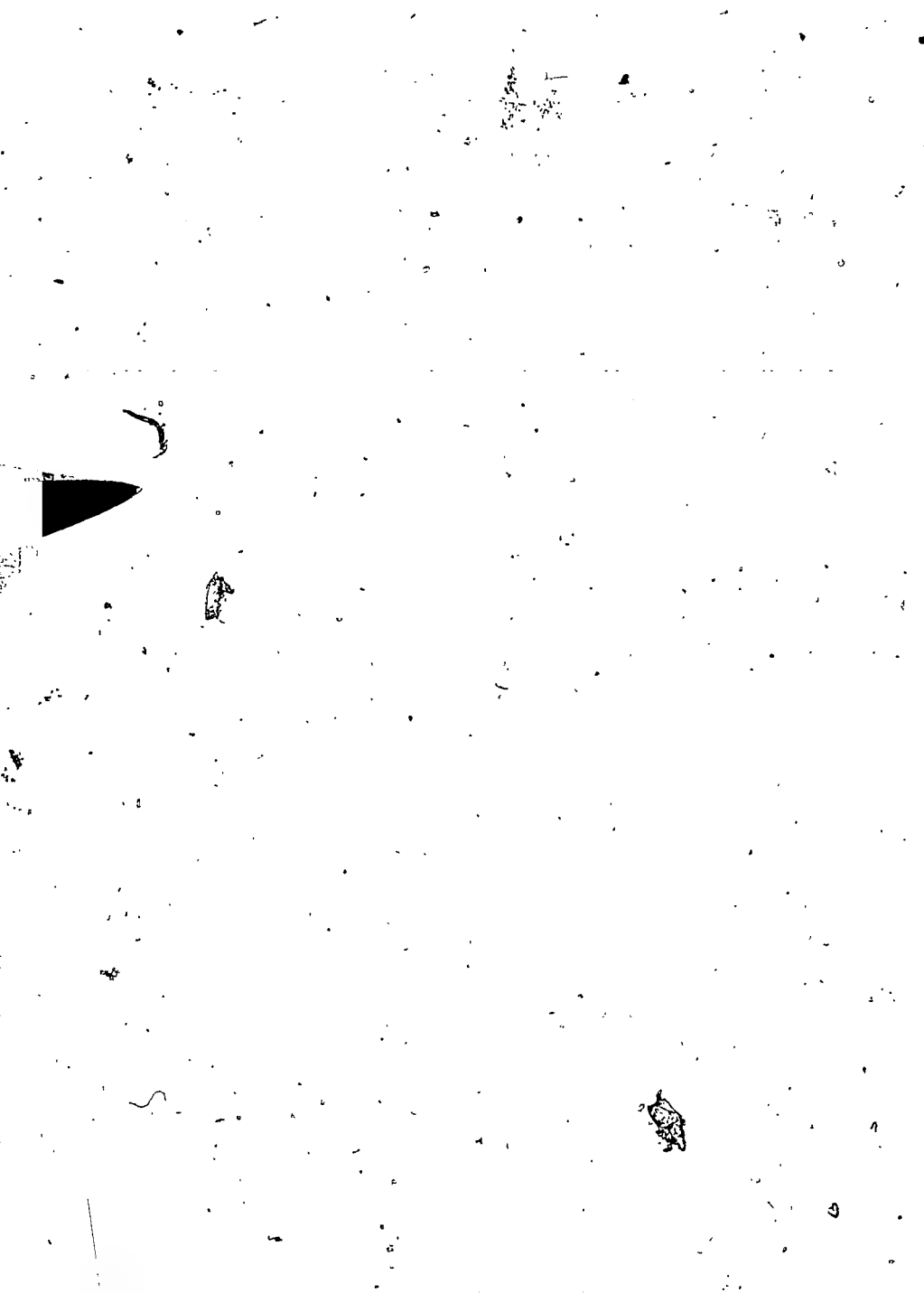
Then there was a postscript, hastily scrawled, "I carry you as a seal upon my heart, as a seal on my arm." That was all.

When she could, she turned again to the padre's letter. He went on:

"Planes are going over in great numbers. We are coming now to the climax of this tremendous bomb-

ing effort. I pray the end may come soon. You must not lose hope entirely. Though I cannot disguise my belief that Jeff and his crew have, as the boys say, bought it, yet strange-things have happened, and may happen again in this case. I pray for fortitude and comfort on your behalf."

Kari folded both letters and put them away.



Chapter XVI

SEARCH WITHOUT FINDING

A FEW days later came the invasion of Europe.

The bombers had done their work. They had softened the continental defences, disrupted the transportation systems, destroyed the sources of supply. They had, according to a famous war-correspondent, shortened the war by two years and saved millions of lives. But at a price. A further price was to be exacted in Normandy, at bloody Caen and Falaise, in the Ardennes, and in Holland. But Kari's price was paid.

She read and re-read Jeff's letter. It was his good-bye. It was also his last will and testament. He had poured into it all that he could of the thoughts and beliefs that were in him.

How precious were the thoughts and beliefs of a man! Enclosed in the consciousness of one individual were so many and so various ideas. Ideas of power and beauty and use. This was the most valuable thing in the world.

It was why when a ship broke up, those on shore put out in little boats. Instinctively they knew that

was what they must do. Above all else, these were precious, these poor, struggling creatures in the water, who had in them life and thought and love. The same thing took miners into rocky caverns to seek out their doomed companions. It was a true and universal reaction.

But now, all over the world, young men, in the full vigour and sweetness of life, were being hurled into death. This infinitely precious thing, this sum total of all they had thought and felt, was being snuffed out, not in one, but in a million lives.

It was monstrous. It was a devilish, suicidal oblation to a mad god. It was human sacrifice on a colossal scale, the offering up of the bodies of a whole generation. It was unendurable, and it was to be endured.

But the finality of it, the sense of extinction, *that* Kari was not prepared to accept. Jeff, himself, had not accepted it. Why then did he not in some way make himself known? Was it that she was too dull to comprehend?

The only person to whom she could go with that question was Beatrice.

Beatrice looked curiously at her. Kari had changed. She had now the direct, absorbed look of one who did not intend to be turned aside from some firm purpose of her own.

"Tell me," she said, "since Eric died, have you ever been aware of him?"

Beatrice flushed. She got up and stood looking out of the window. "Yes," she said softly. "A few times."

"Will you tell me about it?"

"One morning," began Beatrice slowly, "not long

after I got the news, when it came time for me to go to work, I felt it was impossible for me to go. There was no motive power in me. The spring was broken. Then, all at once, it was as if Eric was beside me, as if he said in a matter-of-fact, hard, cheerful voice, 'All right, Mum, let's get going.' And like a hand under my elbow, something got me up out of that chair and on my way, and I went down to the shop and did a good day's work."

Kari sat looking at her. "I haven't felt a thing," she said heavily. "Neither with Kirk nor Jeff." Then abruptly, "Do you pray for the dead?"

"Naturally."

"Why?"

"Why not? On the lowest level, it seems a courteous thing to do. To send them our love and put God's blessing on them, what's wrong with that?"

A few days later when Kari was lunching with Hank, she looked thoughtfully at him. "Will you take me to a Spiritualist reading?"

"Are you serious?"

"Will you?"

"If you must go, I'll go with you."

"Tomorrow night, then."

As they climbed the narrow stair to the address given, Hank looked at Kari and saw in her the same change that Beatrice had seen. She seated herself composedly in the small waiting-room and looked calmly around at the cheap, clean furnishings, the few pictures on the wall, and the waiting clients.

There was nothing secret or esoteric in the atmos-

phere. Women laughed easily and talked in matter-of-fact voices about this and that. Then the door opened and the medium came in. She was a small, dark person with Italian eyes. One of those waiting rose and went with her. The interrupted conversation flowed on.

Hank sat in disapproving silence. Kari waited with a quiet, expressionless face. In ten minutes the door opened again, and the dark-eyed woman said "Next?"

In course of time, it was Kari's turn. When she came out, she said nothing till they were down the stair and out in the dark, warm, shabby street. "Come home with me and I'll tell you," she said.

At home she sat on the green sofa with her feet tucked under her and looked gravely across at him. He filled his pipe and listened.

"I expected something different," she said. "Dim lights and dark hangings. An occult effect." She laughed briefly. "She took me into her kitchen. There was the refrigerator, the table, the sink. A nice, clean kitchen, if small.

"I sat down. I gave her my ring to hold. She stood weaving back and forth, her eyes half-shut. She said, 'An older woman of your family is not well, but soon she'll be all right.' Your mother?' I shook my head. 'Your grandmother?' 'It could be,' I said. She was silent quite a while, then, 'Another person seems to come through. A woman too, and old, white hair, blue eyes. She looks at you with affection. Do you know her? She passed over a long time ago.' I didn't know.

"Then she said, 'Why did you come?' And I told

her, 'Because of my husband who has been missing since December.' She said, 'I'm sorry. I have no message for you. I wish I had.' Then I came away."

"What did you think of her?"

"I thought she was honest."

Hank frowned. "There are many opportunities for deception in that business, unconscious as well as conscious."

"I know. She mentioned that too. Anyway, she had nothing for me."

Hank tamped down the tobacco in the bowl of his pipe. "I have often thought that you had the makings of a fine actress. Now I happen to know some of the members of a play-reading group. Would you like that?"

She stared at him. "Play-reading? Now?"

"It would occupy your mind."

She dismissed the idea. "My mind is occupied," she said.

It was hot that summer, and in spite of the crowded streets, the city seemed empty. Julie took her holidays. Beatrice was away from time to time at a cottage she had on Lake Memphramagog. But Kari refused to leave. "Perhaps later," she said vaguely. After all, what if news should come?

In the house on Pine Avenue, it was different, too. Leone was summering with her family on an island in the St. Lawrence. Old Mr. Osburn no longer sat in the upper hall, plying his pen. Life seemed to hang suspended in the heat, and people walked as little, ate as little, and worked as little as possible.

Sometimes after work, Hank drove with Kari along the south shore of the river where they could watch the cool, tumbling length of the Lachine Rapids.

Once, down at the edge of the shore they found a small, foot-wide wharf, and Kari pushed off her shoes and sat for a while with her bare feet in the urgent, onswEEPing water, so swift that she could not hold them against it. Then she stretched out on the boards, her cheek on her arm, and her eyes turned to the rapids. Her face was blank, yet somehow receptive. She took the roaring water into her consciousness like food and drink.

Hank sat on the bank and watched her. The wind swept her pale hair back. Her firm, slim body was outlined boldly by it. Her legs were brown, all the smooth length of them down to the ankle bone, but the foot was white with blue veins showing along the instep. And only the foot seemed nude.

It amused Hank to think she was clothed and chap-eroned by a coat of tan. For the foot moved him, the bareness of it, the satiny softness, the sheen of the skin, tight over the ankle. He sat still, watching and aware. "Wait," he told himself. "You have only to wait."

She stirred. Meaning came into her face. She smiled ruefully, and sat up. "What a sparkling companion you have!"

"The companion I want." There was warmth in his voice, and he sensed her instant withdrawal. So he resumed his familiar avuncular attitude. Time was his ally. He could wait.

Leone's mother was in the city for a week towards the end of July. She 'phoned, asking Kari to have tea with her.

The two of them sat on a terrace, overlooking the garden. Stone walls fenced the world away. It was cool in the shade of a spreading beech tree. The grass was a smooth carpet, and from below came the faint, sweet smell of roses and nicotiana.

"My dear," said Mrs. Newell, "you've been on my mind."

She smiled at Kari. Smoothly and elegantly clothed in white, and with rings gleaming on her fingers, she had a look of pseudo-youth, guarded by luxury and unceasing care.

"I want to help you," she went on kindly. "And I know I can."

Kari was conscious of an enfolding sensuous comfort. The tea in her cup was amber-coloured, clear and faintly fragrant. The cup itself was sheer as an egg-shell. The very feel of it was gracious and elegant. So was the garden. So were the high, white columns of the porch behind her. So was her hostess.

"My life has been in many ways a hard one," went on Mrs. Newell in her soft voice. "I have had great problems. Some time ago my daughter insisted on having her own apartment. Then, my husband has many other interests. You understand. I might have been very unhappy. But I have surmounted all my troubles. I want to tell you how."

She leaned towards Kari, her face soft with a look of dreamy, hypnotic peace. "The most wonderful man

taught me. So simple. Say over and over again 'All is well,' and all will be well."

Kari spoke carefully over a quick, inner revolt. "How do you know?"

"Try it and see. When my husband is unkind, when my friends do not understand me, when the maids are impertinent, I simply go to my room, draw the blinds, lie down and say 'All is well,' and lovely thoughts come to me and I rise above all my troubles." She leaned back in her chair, bathed in tranquillity.

"But all is not well. How can you say it is?"

"My dear, you must rise to a higher plane. That which disturbs simply does not matter."

"Not the war?"

She shook her head, smiling, and lifted a slim hand horizontally. "Simply rise above it. All is well. Keep calm. Keep sweet. Keep young." She laughed in gentle raillery. "That's what I tell Leone."

Kari subsided. She sat still, drinking her tea, smiling politely and vaguely, a little like Mrs. Newell herself. There was nothing to say. Owing to a difficulty of communication, Kari thought drily. They were not on the same plane.

In August came the official statement that Jeff was now officially considered dead. That was, to Kari, like a blow over the heart to a struggling swimmer. Her feet touched the bitter bottom of despair. Further information followed. The burned-out ruins of a Lancaster bomber had been found on that December day, and at a little distance the body of the navigator.

He had been shot, but by whom, it was not divulged. That was all she would ever know. That was final.

She thought, "If I had known that while I was in the hospital, I might have been able to die. Now, I may live for fifty years."

Then she asked herself, "Do I really want to die? Am I honest in that?" And the answer came, "My body does not want to die. But my mind does." And as when she had learned about Kirk's death, the strength of her body was an affront to her.

In September, the Reverend John Ahearn came to Montreal for a meeting of the General Council of his church. He telephoned to Kari on a Saturday.

"Come to hear me tomorrow, and I'll take you out to lunch. A bargain?"

So in the morning she went to the church where he was for that day preaching.

It was lovely end-of-summer weather. The leaves hung motionless, the sunshine lay on one like a warm touch. But Kari was oblivious to it. Today, loneliness, regret and sorrow filled her, till her very bones ached.

Yet, as she sat quietly in the pew with the light falling rosily on her through the stained glass, the ache in her began to be assuaged. She looked about her. High to her right was a window. Christ, robed in crimson, with the tall, gold candlesticks of the churches at his feet, and a blue sky behind him. A triumphant Christ.

Then the organ pealed and the congregation rose and sang.

"Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In height inaccessible, hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, Thy great name we praise."

The music mounted up, rhythmical, strong and true. Here was worship, whole-souled and self-forgetful, rejoicing in the greatness and goodness of God.

"We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish—but naught changeth Thee."

Here, too, was acceptance of the shortness of life and the sorry fate of man, and, set over against it, the triumphant awareness that "Naught changeth Thee". Here, thought Kari, was sustenance for her depleted self.

She drew a long breath as she sat down.

Then there was John Ahearn looking down at her from the pulpit—iron-gray, square-built and reliable—as she had so often seen him. His sermon, too, was the sort she had heard from him many times. It was not smooth or platitudinous. It was harsh, rather, to smugness or conceit, but there was strength in it, and the hard comfort of the truth.

She waited for him at the door and they went to a nearby hotel for lunch.

He said, after she had enquired about her family and friends, "You've been on our minds, Kari. Tell me, in spite of everything, is it well with you?"

She shook her head.

"Can I help?"

"I think so."

"Why didn't you go to the minister of the church that you attend?"

She shook her head again. "He's just the right age to have missed both wars. He has a wife and a young family. Everything is coming his way. You can tell that he doesn't know anything about trouble."

"It's not his fault if he's been lucky. What is on your mind?"

"A lot. Start with this. What do you think of Spiritualism?"

"I think there has been a great deal of exploitation of grief connected with it. Yet when all the evidence is sifted, there remains a residue of experience that cannot be explained away on what we call rational grounds. We're not so cocksure about these things as we used to be. After all, in a world where a mathematician calls a piece of iron a melodic continuity!"

"Then you think there's something there?"

"I think there's something there, but as a rule, it doesn't do much good to tinker with it."

"I tried to find Jeff that way. Without success."

He looked at her keenly, then picked up his fork and frowned at it. "My wife died ten years ago. I know how it is. Conventional comfort is not of much use. Time doesn't heal all, as they say. The sense of pain and loss remains. But one's power of endurance grows. Have you had your holidays yet? No?

"Well, you should take them," he went on. "Get back to the earth, which is our mother. Lie on the ground, let the sun warm you, and the wind blow on you. I also commend you to God. To the great beliefs about God, the daring and difficult thought that God

cares for man, the tremendous idea that life goes on after death. There you've got something."

Kari was silent for a while, thinking. She said slowly, "I was told to say over and over again, 'All is well,' and all would be well."

"Self-hypnosis. I say rather, holding fast to whatever faith is in you, take what comes, don't ignore it or refuse to look at it, accept it, live with it, build it into your life. And go on with God."

Kari went to bed that night, more relaxed and strengthened than she had yet been. She slept deeply, and woke just in time to get ready for the shop. But before she left, Amaryllis came toiling up the steps with a suitcase.

"There's another box downstairs, honey lamb. Miss Osburn signed for you. Ma'am, I know what it is. ~~Don't~~ touch it now. Leave it till night-time."

"No," decided Kari.

Jeff's belongings had come back to her.

She 'phoned Beatrice that she would be late. Then she sat down with the box and the suitcase. She unpacked them. For a long time she held the tunic on her lap, tracing the seams with her finger, bossing the buttons, smoothing the gray-blue sleeve. There was a leather case full of her letters, and some from his father and Cicely. She shuffled them through her hands. She had not the fortitude to read what she had written in happier days.

Slipping them back into the case, one caught her eye. It was stamped Montreal. But it was not hers. She

looked at the date on the envelope. It must have been one of the last letters he got.

Hesitatingly, she pulled it half out of the envelope. A man's handwriting. Old handwriting. It was from Jonathan Osburn, and it stated that Kari had received a lame man in her room late at night, and it implied that she was unfaithful to her husband.

She read it unbelievably. Then she re-read it in anger and outrage.

She thought of Jeff getting that letter before going out on his last mission. It was too much. That should not happen to anyone. And it had happened to Jeff.

She spilled the other letters into the box. Then on a wave of fury she ran down the stairs and burst into Martha Osburn's office.

"This is what my husband got from your father."

Miss Osburn picked the letter up, read it and flushed painfully.

"What do you want me to do?" she asked in a dull, shamed voice. "Besides saying that I'm sorry."

"You? Nothing. I want to see him."

"But you can't. He's ill. Cancer."

Kari drew back, like a swooping hawk, foiled of its prey. She whitened. She looked levelly at Martha, her face cruel and cold.

"I hope it will be long and painful," she said, and walked back upstairs.

Gone was the peace and the quiet courage that had come to her over the week-end. There was no room in her now for anything but anger. And a great

revulsion against life or fate or God, or whatever was in control.

She thought of a whole generation of boys giving their lives for the good of their elders, and their elders sitting at home, full of selfishness and sometimes of malevolence. They were not worth it.

That was plain to her now. The people at home were not worth the dying that was being done for them. Balance them as human beings, one against the other, and the economy that sacrificed youth to middle age was not sound. On one hand take Jeff, Kirk, Eric, Franz; and on the other, that old, sick, vicious man, Osburn, and Hal Underwood and Mrs. Newell. Or take on one hand, the long line of young flying men she had watched march singing by, the day Jeff left; and on the other, the peevish, pushing, petty mob that thronged a down-town bus.

"We've been a generation of fools," she thought.

She looked up at the painting on her wall. "Now I know how you feel," she said aloud. "Life's a bad joke, and it's on us."

The rubicund old face, so full of robust and cynical humour, smiled hardily back at her. "What did you expect?" it seemed to say.

Chapter XVII

TENSIONS

KARI said one day to Hank, "Remember Joe Hurley? He was with the unemployed men who marched into Regina before the war. Then he came to live at our place. He's been killed."

Hank murmured in commiseration. "That's bad."

"It's particularly bad when you stop to think. During the depression, his country made it abundantly clear to him that he was not wanted. Then when War came, that same country called on him for his life."

Said Hank, "I hope that in the army, at any rate, he felt needed and important. That would be something. And he *was* needed."

Kari sat, deep in thought. She was remembering the other unemployed men. Ed. Tony. Where were they now? Had they joined up too, and gone off to fight for a country that had no place for them in time of peace?

The unemployment problem had been long since solved. The armed forces had taken up the slack. The

casualty lists were still further reducing it. Soon the problem would be one of man-power.

But it was surely plain now that the misery of those days of the depression could have been greatly reduced. There was plenty of money available to fight a war, when that grim necessity arose.

Yet, really, why had there to be either a war or a depression? Was it from lack of brains, or lack of conscience? Was it because the human animal had not come far enough up from the jungle?

"Hank," she cried, "what is the basic cause of war?"

"Maladjustment, mostly economic. The economic war goes on under cover for quite a while first."

Kari shook her head. "No. What is really basic is selfishness. And fear. Especially fear of change."

She thought of Jeff suddenly and of that snowy, sunny day in the little log house in the mountains, and of how he had said, "Sit loose in the saddle to the things of time. Take it easy. Cut loose from avarice and self-interest." "But, Oh, Jeff, darling," she told him in her mind, "it's too much to hope for with people as they are."

She sighed fiercely and turned to Hank. "Selfishness and fear. That's why there'll never be peace for any length of time."

"Try not to be bitter, Kari."

Kari looked soberly at him. He had been her teacher. He had been for many years her friend. He liked to look after her and plan her life for her. She knew in her heart that he aspired in time to be her lover. She was aware without looking at it, of his lame foot that kept him at home and safe. It was no fault of his. Yet

at times she hated him because he was alive and Kirk and Jeff gone. As she sometimes hated herself for the same reason.

"Of course I'm bitter," she said aloud. "Because I've been a gullible fool. I haven't known what was going on all around me."

"For instance?"

"I was coming home on the bus the other day. Two men were sitting behind me. Youngish, healthy, prosperous. I saw them as they got on. They were talking about a business venture. One said softly, 'What about military service?' And the other said, 'I know a man.' Then they both laughed, low, under their breath."

Said Hank, "Set over against that, the thousands who are offering themselves every day."

"I know," admitted Kari. "But they're getting killed, and these are—getting rich."

Hank was silent, and after a little Kari went on. "Beatrice and I were at Red Cross the other night, and they were talking about war memorials. A little early yet for that, but . . . 'This time we must have living memorials,' they kept saying. Why is it so important to have living memorials to dead boys? But they weren't thinking about the dead boys."

"Sure?"

"Sure," she came back fiercely. "You should have heard them. 'As long as it's useful. It must be useful.'"

"To whom?" asked Beatrice.

"To all of us."

"I thought it was a memorial."

"Come now," said a bosomy old dowager. "You



don't mean that you approve of all those stubby little monuments that dot the countryside. Of what use are they?

"At least they say something. They say, these died in the days of their youth that the rest of you might live in peace. That's something."

"There was a babble of protest. Useful. It had to be useful. Then a plain-looking woman looked up from her sewing-machine and let them have it. 'If you need a hospital, or a town hall, or an abattoir, or a comfort-station, for God's sake, build it, but don't try to get it cheap by cashing in on the death of our boys.' Then she burst into tears and left the room."

"What would you like to see as a memorial?"

Her face softened. "Something lovely. Like the thing they did, throwing away their lives for the rest of us. A carillon of bells, a chapel, a marble shaft, a gift in their name to other boys."

"But nothing useful?"

"Nothing selfish. Nothing that is really for ourselves. On the same plane as giving Johnnie rubbers for Christmas. Especially," she added softly, "when Johnnie isn't wearing rubbers any more."

Hank sighed. "You're not fair, you know. There is selfishness anywhere. But the country as a whole has gone all out. Kari, when are you going home?"

"Do you think it would do me good?"

He nodded.

"I was going, then . . ."

"I know. Then Maisie got married."

"Yes. Understand, it's all right. She was lonely for

a long time. Then she fell in love. I don't blame her. I'm fond of her. But I'd rather not see the two of them together for a while."

Meanwhile the war was going on. Canadian soldiers were advancing in the Scheldt by amphibious operations. They were nearing Antwerp. There were many casualties.

In Canada at this time, the principal casualty seemed to be the delicate plant of national unity. The Canadian army overseas needed reinforcements. Could the Canadian army at home, conscripted for the defence of the country, be sent overseas? Some said Yes. Some said No. Politicians, looking towards re-election, were desperately trying to gauge the feeling of the people. The people themselves were taut with anxiety and anger and a reflection of the indecision of their leaders.

Julie felt the strain of those days. She had never claimed any high-minded ideals, nor world nor even country-wide consciousness. Her mind focused close before her. But now she was torn between two loyalties, to her husband on operations overseas, and to her people at home who seemed reluctant to send further help over.

She took Kari home with her one night to her uncle's house beside Lafontaine Park, for dinner.

"My aunt has an affection for you," she explained. "Also a great sympathy. She has so many children, and now me, and she would take you in too as a daughter. She is a true French-Canadian mother."

As the girls walked through the park, leaves scuffed pleasantly beneath their feet, and the air was full of-

a soft, autumnal sadness. The little stone-walled lake reflected a gentle pattern of trees and sky. Indeed, the park was like a quiet, green island of peace hedged about by the noises of the city.

They came out of it and into the street. A block away there was a confused mass of men. They were milling about, gesticulating and shouting. All at once they began to roll up the street, spreading irregularly like a dark, moving blot, and giving a curious impression of lack of cohesion or control.

In sudden alarm Julie and Kari picked up their feet and ran. They burst into the doorway of the red brick house.

Madame met them with consternation in her face. M'sieu, hovering behind her, reassured them gloomily.

"There was no danger. The men were on their way to a meeting."

Then they all gathered around the table, Henri, Antoinette and the others. But the gaiety and the cheer was lacking. The shadow of that mob of men hung over that table, so bright with Madame's fine china and silver, and garlanded round by her baker's dozen of boys and girls.

They tried to talk about other things, but it was of no use.

Julie said, laying down her soup spoon, "There is my Gus. If he should be killed, and my people hold back, saying it is not their war, then I'll give up my people forever."

"*Tais-toi, Julie.*" Her uncle bent his brows at her. "You talk of what you do not know. It is not so simple."

It goes far back. You, too, Kari. You do not understand. *Bien*. I will tell you.

"We are a logical people, we French-Canadians. We are no fools. But it has been our misfortune that politicians have coveted the vote of the Quebec *bloc* and have lied very much to get it."

Kari wanted to say, "Why *bloc*? Have you no separate opinions?" But she kept silent.

M'sieu went on. "Some time ago we were told very earnestly that in Quebec there would never be conscription for overseas."

"And why should Quebec be treated differently?" interjected Kari silently.

"We believed that," went on M'sieu, his moustache quivering. "We believed it like Frenchmen, not like English or Americans who would understand it to mean if things remain as they are. Being logical, we took it straight. We are like that, sentimental but logical. So now, when they tell us there must be conscription for overseas, we say *Non, non*."

"Now, if the government would say, 'Sorry, my friend, we make big mistake. Help us, please.' Then, *bon*, we go maybe. But do they say that? *Non*, and in the rest of Canada they call us 'The *maudits* pea-soups! Our feelings, they are hurt.'"

He laid his hand on his vest, and his brown eyes were moist.

Kari plucked up her courage. "Why do you talk of a *bloc*?"

He looked gloomily at her. "Because we are a *bloc*. That is our fault, and it is your fault, too."

There was an uneasy silence. Then Madame spoke

from her end of the table. "The time will come when women will have something to say. We will refuse to have children to be killed in a man-made war. We will cease to be women."

She looked thoughtfully at Kari, at Julie, at her daughters. "We have just that one weapon that is strong enough."

M'sieu burst into tolerant laughter. "*Misère!* Not for one day would you hold together."

"Why not?"

"Because you are women, *cherie*. You think like the man you love."

Her long Norman face was expressionless. "Do not be so sure, *mon mari*."

The voice of a radio announcer broke in. They were all still, listening.

The Canadians had advanced five miles west of Antwerp.

Chapter XVIII

EDOUARD DESAUTELS

Two soldiers, in well-worn battle-dress, walked rapidly towards a small brick house on the outskirts of a Belgian town. They looked about them appraisingly.

"Seems all right," said Paul Gagnon. The buildings were snug and shipshape, and the whole yard was shaded by an enormous willow tree. There was a garden patch, and a hutch for rabbits against the wall of the shed.

At their knock the door swung open. A tall, lean old woman stood looking at them.

Paul spoke to her in his Canadian French. Before the war he had been a guide in the bush country north of Lake St. John. His companion was an Indian from the Qu'Appelle Reserve in Saskatchewan, Dan Laurel.

They followed Madame into the kitchen. It was a small room, and bare. Plain brick walls, a table, three chairs and a stove.

"Where do we sleep, Madame Desautels?" asked Paul. She pointed to the stair.

They clumped up in their heavy boots and let their packs fall to the floor. It was a fair-sized attic-room, with a small window to the east and another to the west. A few clothes hung about on pegs, a chest stood against one wall, and there was a bed, made up high and soft.

Madame had come noiselessly up. She pointed to the bed. "*Mon fils*," she said, and their glance followed hers to the window. A man was pulling onions in the garden below. One sleeve of his coarse blue smock was pinned back. There was a patch over his eye.

"My son," she repeated, and went on, speaking rapidly in French.

Paul translated. "She says the Boches took him away for slave labour. He lost his arm in an accident, also the sight of one eye. They let him escape when he wasn't any good to them. He is not very strong, so she'd like him to keep his bed."

"Oh, sure," agreed Dan.

"She'll make up two good beds for us. Fresh straw in the ticks."

They grinned at her reassuringly, and she sighed in evident relief and went to the head of the stair. There she paused and flung a quick, sly glance over her shoulder at them, then went on down.

"The old girl looks a little cracked," observed Paul.

Dan stood looking out of the window. The young Belgian was sitting against the wall of the shed, braiding onions. He worked deftly with the fingers of his right hand, while his left half-arm clasped the string of onions against his side. In the lines of his body, bent

as it was, there was a sort of brittle strength and dejection.

Paul came and stood by Dan. "Poor guy," he said.

When they came back at night, they met him, the son, Edouard. He was very quiet, but Dan thought that the one good eye of his watched them very closely. When the three of them came upstairs, Edouard looked at the arrangement of beds and went promptly down again. They could hear his voice and Madame's raised in argument.

Paul listened and translated. "He says we are to have the bed. She says, 'Then you sleep in my bed and I'll make a place in the kitchen.' '*Maudit*,' he says, 'What nonsense!' So he's to sleep on the floor here."

Madame came up and changed over the bedding. Then Edouard came.

"Sleep well, *mes amis canadiens*," he said softly, and shrugged himself out of his few garments and thrust his long body between the blankets of his palliasse.

They stayed for ten days with Madame Desautels and her son. Sometimes they brought her tins of meat from their rations and she added it to the contents of the black pot on the back of the stove. At night when they came in, they would have bowls of it around the kitchen table, with hunks of bread broken from the long, brown loaf. It tasted good on those cold fall evenings—meat and vegetables in a thick brown gravy.

Paul was affable and friendly with their hosts. He could talk French which was evidently as familiar to the Desautels as Flemish. Edouard smiled gently across

the table at them and Madame unbent a little, but she was never quite at ease.

Dan thought about that one night, lying in the big bed in the room under the eaves. He was alone. Paul had a rendezvous in the village and Edouard had not yet come up. Might Madame have been guilty of collaboration with the Germans? Possibly to get her son home again? Whatever the cause, clearly she had something on her mind.

The Belgian's quick step sounded on the stair. Dan heard him go over to the corner where his pallet was, stand there for a while, then come softly over to the bed.

"Dan Laurel," came a quick whisper. "Do you know me?"

Dan raised on one elbow. "Edouard Desautels, aren't you?"

"Shush! Look, tomorrow evening I'm taking the cow to the far pasture. Meet me at eight beneath the tall poplar at the bend in the road. Right?"

"Right. You talk good English."

There was a sigh of laughter. "Good night."

The next night at eight Dan sat with his back against the Lombardy poplar at the turn of the road, and watched Edouard coming towards him through the dusk. He walked well, his long legs swinging smartly and his body easy and erect. But there was that sleeve that hung empty, and the black patch that covered not only one eye but a large part of cheek and brow as well.

"Hello, Dan," he said and sat down.

Dan offered a cigarette and a light, looking keenly at him.

"Thanks," said Edouard. Then he smiled crookedly and reached up and pulled off the black patch.

The lids were sunk deep into the empty eye-socket. Red streaks radiated out from it, and there was a splotch of white in the brown hair over the temple.

He said softly, "Do you know me now, Dan?"

Dan stared, his brown face impassive. Then his nostrils quivered.

"I see that you do. I'm Jeffrey Gilbride."

Dan nodded. "Yes, it could be. You've changed."

Again that wry smile. "I have."

He stretched out on his back, his body sinking flatly into the deep grass. A tiny spiral of smoke rose from his cigarette. A few crows winged their way raucously towards the dark wood across the river. The last light of the sun faded from the sky and there was a chill in the air.

"Are you warm enough?" asked Dan.

"Oh, quite."

He carefully snubbed out his cigarette and then stared up into the sky as he talked.

"First I shall tell you about the family Desautels. They lived here on this farm and were at one time, I think, fairly prosperous. Then the war came and the Occupation. The father was an outspoken chap. He got shot. The son, who had never been strong, the Germans took for slave labour. He died in Germany. It would seem that I look like him.

"After that, Madame became queer. Vague and visionary. She talked to herself. The village children were afraid to meet her on the road after dark.

All this I learned after I came on the scene. Last December."

He turned over and picked up a clover leaf, smoothing it with the sensitive long fingers of his right hand.

"We bombed Dusseldorf that night. Caught a packet over the target, then on the way home, flak and night-fighters. The plane was peppered. They got five of the crew. All but the navigator and myself. I was shot up. But not Ron. We had to bail. I blacked out before I hit the ground, and I never knew what happened to Ron. I've often wondered. Well, I came to, later."

He shut his eyes. He forgot Dan. He forgot the intervening months. He was lying in a bed in a room with a sloping roof, and two people were looking at him. An old woman and a man. The man had a pointed beard.

His eyes hurt, but he thought with a wild surge of happiness, "I can see. Out of one of them, anyway." Abruptly a bandage covered them both.

Then he remembered his arm. He struggled to move. The doctor murmured softly in French.

He knew French. "*Mon bras*," he demanded, but his voice came out in a whisper. "Have you cut it off?"

"No, my friend. It was already gone. Likewise the one eye. But if you will be quiet, once the abrasions are healed, you will see."

Oblivion came down over him like a blanket. Sometimes the blanket lifted. He remembered the feeling of hot broth slipping down his throat. Then came days when fever burned in him and he wandered in delirium through a strange distorted world.

The fever receded. He drank more and more of the

thin broth. The bandage was taken from his good eye. It was true. He could see. The tall old woman stood there. He looked at her.

"Mon fils," she said and wept.

When he was stronger, he asked, "Has the doctor been here?"

"Not since that day when you spoke first. On his way home he was taken by the Germans. He had a connection with the White Army. So they shot him."

He was puzzled. In some obscure way, from some vibration in her voice, he knew that she was glad the doctor had been shot. He lay and thought about it. It made no sense. Then he slept.

The next day he felt stronger. He looked around the room for his clothes. They were not in sight. When Madame came in he said, "Where are my clothes?"

She opened a chest and held up a faded blue cotton smock and brown cloth trousers. "Here," she said.

He looked at her. "My clothes, I mean. My uniform. What happened to the parachute?" His fingers fumbled at his throat for his identity disc. It was gone. Panic seized him.

"Where are they?" he shouted. "What have you done with them?"

She laid a hand on his forehead. "My son, these are your clothes. You have no others."

The next day he came back to it. "Tell me," he said peremptorily, and waited.

She sat down by the bed. He had thought at times she was slightly demented. But not now. She looked alert and wary. "What is there to tell you, my son?"

"Everything."

"You have been a long time away. Now you have come home."

"Home?"

"*Oui*," reasonably. "You have been for three years with the Boches. You do not remember. That blow on the temple! But it will come back. Some day you will recall. How you lived here as a little boy, and went to school, and grew up. Then the Germans came. You had to go with them. But when you were no longer able to work, they let you come home."

Her words came, spaced and steady. Her eyes were fixed unwaveringly on his face. Then she got up and laid a hand on his shoulder. "*Mon fils*," she said in fierce affection, and left him.

He was tired. Let it rest, he decided. For the present.

He slept and dreamed of Kari, and woke on the thought of her anxiety and distress. He must get back to England without delay. He must circumvent the plans of old Madame who had willed him into her dead son's place. At present he was fenced in by her implacable purpose.

But let him once get on his feet and he would be away. He would make contact with the White Army. Plans seethed in his mind. He tired himself with planning. Again he slept.

The next morning he felt stronger. When Madame came in, "*Bon jour*," he said cheerfully.

"*Bon jour, ma mère*," she corrected him.

He smiled at her. "*Oui, ma mère*."

She flushed and her eyes filled with tears. She moved

over to the chest of drawers, and came back in a moment with shears in her hand and a folded towel.

"I shall cut your hair," she announced briskly, and fitted the towel about him as he sat propped among the pillows. "This is not the first time I have done this, Edouard. When you were small, you used to sit on a high stool in the yard and watch the curls fall in the grass."

"Curls?" he thought, but said nothing.

"*Prenez garde,*" she cried gaily, when he moved. "Would you have me clip the ear?"

She was in high spirits. Probably for the first time in years, she was happy. Nevertheless the time was coming when she would have to be disillusioned.

"Your old friends will now come to see you, Edouard. I have explained well to them. How the blow on the head lost for you your remembrance, and how the years with the Boches were so terrible that you will not speak of them."

He was thinking of Kari and only half heard what she said. "Bring a mirror," he cried, rubbing the sides of his head and feeling light and excited.

She hesitated, went down the stair and came up with a small brown-backed hand mirror, laid it on the bed and left him.

He took it up. He held it before him for a long time. When his arm ached, he propped it against his knees.

It was not a pretty face that he saw. One side was a mass of twisted scar-tissue. The flesh about the other eye was still discoloured and the gashes barely healed. "Caliban," he muttered.

What of Kari?

He lifted the mirror and looked again. For a long time. Then turned and buried his monstrous face in the pillow. The glass slipped and shattered on the floor.

Madame Desautels did not immediately invite her friends. Her son was ill again, lying weak and unresponsive in the high bed, and making no answer when she spoke. She sat in the kitchen, knitting and listening for a sound from above. Her face was soft with pity, yet there was in her eyes from time to time a flicker of satisfaction.

Meanwhile during the dreary winter days, there in the room under the eaves, with the long willow branches sweeping the windows and the sleet hissing on the roof, Jeff lay in conversation with himself.

One part of him said, "Kari loves you. She has courage."

And the other replied, "But you have not. Not courage enough to see her eyes flee away when she looked at you."

He thought of the letter that had come on the day before his last flight, from that malicious old man, so given to letter-writing. He had no belief at all in what had been implied, but one thing was clear. There were men eager for Kari, were he out of the way. Whole men, in full vigour, to match her youth. It was food for thought. It was bitter food. He chewed on it for a long time.

Here was he with a face like a gargoyle, blind in one eye and with an arm gone. What kind of a husband was he for that fair-haired, resplendent, tall girl? What kind of a living could he earn for her? On the other

hand, were his days to be spent in this alien low land of Flanders, tied to a half-demented old woman?

He flung off the covers and twisted himself over on his face, and lay rigid with revulsion.

But the next morning when Madame brought up his breakfast, he said evenly, "*Bon jour, ma mère,*" and her fierce old eyes were full of love and triumph.

Since then it had been a case of a day at a time, and dulling the mind to memory, and indulging in the luxury of thought as little as possible.

He lived through the tale as he told it, step by step. Then he opened his eyes and looked at Dan.

After a minute of silence, Dan reached again for his cigarettes and passed them with a comforting, almost a maternal gesture. "Tough," he said in his deep, slow voice, and held a light.

Jeff's face was briefly illuminated. He looked white and tired.

He began again. "Of course, as soon as I became strong and well physically, my mental health began to be restored. I knew that, scarred or not, Kari would want me back. I knew, too, that I didn't intend to spend my life as a Belgian peasant. And that, though Madame's obsession was useful in that it gave me sanctuary and kept me from being taken prisoner by the Germans, yet I must get out of here and back to England. So"—he smiled at Dan—"I've been waiting for you fellows."

"But"—his face went tense again, and he ground out his cigarette nervously—"I have to think first of what will be best for Kari."

Dan's Indian face was as impassive as always, but his



voice was deep and reassuring. "Kari's a good girl," he said slowly. "I know her. A little scar, what's that?"

"This is not a little scar," corrected Jeff grimly. "This is something special in scars. Besides, there's my arm. Also the passing of time."

He was silent again, his marked face bleak and hard with thought. Then, "The passing of time. And what will be best for her. I remember once, being very sure that most of the trouble in the world came from a too fierce absorption in self-interest. Here's where I hold myself up against my fine theory.

"She may be in love with someone else now," he went on harshly.

Dan shook his head stubbornly. "It's because you've been sick, that you feel that way."

Jeff looked at him for a moment. "Maybe. But I'm trying to face this, realistically. Anyway, this is what I want you to do. Get home as fast as you can. I think the war is nearly over. Find out about Kari. If she is free, send me word at once."

"I'll do my best. But I still think . . . Why don't you just send her a cable?"

Jeff eyed him grimly. "What if she's married? She's very—you know what she's like—attractive."

"I know." He paused, sorting his thoughts. "But I'd say that she was faithful, too."

Then the bleakness in Jeff broke up suddenly into emotion. He was silent for a moment under the impact of it.

"Thank you, Dan," he said then, softly and unsteadily. "I'd say so, too. But you must remember that I'll have been presumed dead. Quite a while ago."

"Sure," agreed Dan. "I see." And they both got to their feet.

"Don't lose any time, will you?" suggested Jeff in a voice that was brittle with strain. Then, "You go on to the house. I'll come later."

They shook hands briefly, the tall, maimed Englishman in peasant clothes, and the Indian in battle-dress. All that was gone before in their lives was different. Only once before had their paths touched. Now, the whole future of one depended on what happened to the other in the next few months.

"Take care of yourself," said Jeff with irony and affection. Then they parted.

Before Dan lay the Scheldt Estuary and Nijmegen.



Chapter XIX

WINTER TO SPRING

HIRAM OWENDOWER dumped his duffel-bag on a bench in Dominion Square, sat down beside it and frowned fiercely at the pigeons lighting and flapping and cooing at his feet.

It was a warmish day in February. The snow was soft, the sky was blue, and the branches of the trees were black against it. Tall buildings edged the park. Behind Hiram, a stone cathedral took the wintry sun in beauty. A peal of bells shook themselves out jubilantly, and then stroked out the hour in hoarse, sweet, level clangs.

But Hiram saw and heard nothing.

He was thinking.

People turned to stare at him in passing. He was tall, broad, black-bearded, and young, as he had been. The gold loops dangled from his ears, his eyes were the same deep, Cornish blue, but they were not now full of laughter. They were intent and preoccupied. Hiram was rehearsing a campaign.

It had been well planned. It hung together perfectly. He had had no misgivings at all, even on the train coming in to Montreal. Now, trepidation seized him.

The campaign concerned Leone. The whole thing stemmed out from the leave he had spent in Montreal when he had met her. The affair had begun with complete casualness.

He made a date with a girl at a canteen. He and that girl ran into Leone on the street. Leone stopped to speak to her. A rather unwilling introduction followed. There had been a sudden glint in Leone's eyes, and in his. As if a shutter had clicked briefly open, and communication had been thereby set up that did not depend on words. He had pursued the acquaintance. Naturally. She interested him. She was a high-class product. He was doing himself proud that leave.

He went away, and practically forgot her. But not quite. Months passed. A year. Then disaster struck, and death brushed close by him. He was in a naval incident. He had a ship sunk under him, saw his comrades drown, and was himself sent home, waiting reassignment.

The experience shook him. He was soberly glad to be alive. He walked over the Cornish moors and along the shore, and watched the wild, white ocean beat out its heart against the black rocks. Sea-gulls volplaned down the wind on wide, pale wings. The gale blew, the waves roared, the sun poured down. This was his land; old and wild and strong. Here would he live when the war was over.

An ancient hostelry stood on a cliff overlooking the

sea, with good branch roads leading east and west from it. The innkeeper was decrepit and weary, and help was scarce.

Thought Hiram, "When the war's finished, I'll buy the place, and live here by the sea, and marry, and have four, five big sons to come after me."

And who was the wild gypsy woman by whom he would have them? He thought of this one and that, in various parts of the world. Then he said to himself, "Could you have your pick, me lad, who would it be? Who but the black-eyed, bad-tempered Leone?" He laughed aloud, there on the cliff by the sea, at what he planned for her. Make a real woman out of her, the pampered hussy! The more he thought about it; the more vigorously the idea grew, and the surer he was about it.

He sent a cable from Penzance. He never wrote letters—a waste of time. So he cabled:

"A fine stone house here, where you and I will be living some day."

After that, he thought of her often, on land and sea. He felt increasingly in love with her. Not only physically. It went deeper. It was an intangible feeling, yet real, a sense of belonging, she to him and he to her. He grinned. And he didn't even trust the wench. But she was his woman for all that.

From time to time he sent messages to her. At an eastern port he despatched a telegram, chewing thoughtfully on his pencil as he composed it, and scowling at the clerk who made the mistake of smiling.

"Short leave," he growled, his eyes glinting. "Making love at long distance. Ever try it?"

"On stormy nights the spray flies in the bedroom windows," was the wire he sent.

Well, here he was now, only a few blocks from Leone, and his nerve had failed him. But what the . . . He rose, scattering the silly pigeons. He hitched up his trousers, hunched his shoulders, and set out.

An hour later he was sitting with Leone on the white leather love-seat in her apartment. Her dark eyes were bright with excitement.

"A fine stone house," she scoffed. "I was all set to be the lady of the manor."

He laughed boisterously. "The inn-keeper's wife, me dear. 'What'll it be, mates, ale or bitters?'"

"I'll tell you what it'll be. A specialty place. I have the makings of a good business woman."

"I counted on that." He smoothed his whiskers complacently. "Not that it's entirely a commercial proposition." He reached for her, but she eluded him.

"Times, you'll be a bad-tempered wench," he grumbled and whacked her affectionately. Then he got up, put a firm arm around her and kissed her. "One thing you got to remember. No foolin' around, see? I'm a jealous man."

"And I'm a jealous woman. Remember that, too."

He looked at her in love and admiration.

They were married. Leone cut incisively through the anguished protests of her mother, and Hal's incredulous amazement. Then Hiram went back to sea, and Leone promptly got herself a job in a ski-lodge in the Laurentians, and set out to learn the hotel business.

Kari was diverted by the turn of events. In spite

of the surface incongruities, the marriage seemed inherently suitable. Yet one thought stayed with her, like a thorn in the flesh of her mind.

Hiram, in spite of the magnificence of his physique, stood much lower in the scale of humankind than Jeff or Kirk or Eric. The thoughts, the desires, the aspirations, that were enclosed in his consciousness, were not so sensitive, so civilized, or so precious as in the case of the others.

Yet they had died with all their music in them. They were cut off. Their children would never be born. While Hiram and that arrogant, hard woman, Leone, had been preserved by an inscrutable providence to propagate their kind. She was glad for them, but she was not resigned to the loss of the others.

Beatrice and Julie were amused at the fate of the ornamental Leone and her swashbuckling sailor. As for Hal Underwood, no one saw him about the shop for some weeks. Then one March day, when a blizzard without belied the flowery signs of spring in the window, there he was, wandering about as usual.

"No more Silver Shillings?" He smiled at Kari.

"They're out of season."

"I thought they were indestructible."

"They are, in a way. Maybe I can find some for you."

Pencil poised over her pad, she wondered whom they were for.

"I meant them for you," he said. "I was thinking of the day I first saw you, and you showed me the Silver Shillings. But it was a foolish thought. I'll fall back on roses. Those yellow ones you liked."

From that time on, Hal sent her flowers regularly.

Often he took her out to dinner. He was an affable and entertaining host with a wide background of travel. He liked to talk about the places he had been. There was a certain valley in the Alps, carpeted with pale blue flowers. Sweden, he greatly admired, and he planned a holiday in Mexico after the war.

Freedom of movement, thought Kari, is definitely one of the best things money can provide.

Hal was not one of that small group of very rich men in the city, but he had a substantial back-log of wealth, garnered during three generations, and was himself an astute business man. His war contracts had been profitable. Naturally, he gave generously to the War Loans, to the Red Cross, and to all well-authenticated charities. He was a solid citizen.

Kari was aware that she was being deftly and carefully courted. She was indifferent to the fact. What did it matter if she ate good food to the sound of soft music in Hal's company, or in Hank's? It gave her the temporary, but real comfort of a woman with an escort. But it failed to assuage or to touch in any way the knowledge that the two people whom she loved above all others, had died violent and terrible deaths, and that the same fate was daily befalling others like them, and that those at home, unless directly involved, seemed to take it very easily indeed.

She was unjust, of course. Women were working, early and late, in the Red Cross. Girls were joining the Services. Older men, by the hundreds, would have gone jubilantly to death in place of their sons. Hank cared about the tragedy of the times. So, in his way, did Hal. Indeed, what Hal felt for her had its begin-

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ning in his concern for her, as one hurt by the war. When they were at the theatre and war films were shown, he was visibly moved.

Then it came over Kari, in sudden revulsion, that he enjoyed being moved. He was shaken out of himself, as by a great drama of love and death and terror. Which, of course, war was. He was stimulated by it, not stricken.

On the other hand, when she sat beside him in the darkened theatre, and on the screen a plane burst into flames and plummeted down, she was physically ill. It made no difference if it were an Allied or an enemy plane, her heart was passionately with the crew. She shut her eyes. She wanted to leave. But Hal was absorbed. She could hear him breathing in soft, fascinated gasps.

One night, when he took her home after such a picture, he kissed her solemnly, then hotly. She pushed him away.

"I'm a married woman, Hal."

"Kari, be reasonable. It's a year and a half."

"Not quite," sharply.

He looked at her in pity. "Are you never lonely?"

She thought for a while. "I am. I'm desperately lonely, by day and by night. For an English flyer lying beneath a pile of crumpled metal somewhere in Europe."

He went on earnestly. "I'm not a jealous man, Kari. I understand about that. What we saw on the screen tonight makes me love you more."

He was so smooth, so well-tailored. He was nourished on good food. He slept on a soft mattress. A picture

that had been on the screen flashed before her again. Air crew being questioned on their return from a mission. There had been complete weariness in those boys' faces. Their eyes were black-circled. Their very hands looked limp. They were near the breaking point. Did seeing them make Hal think he loved her more? Anger thickened her throat.

"Did you ever read that in pagan times, revellers used to go to see men tortured to re-inflame their jaded senses?"

"Forgive me," she went on in a moment, looking ruefully into Hal's bewildered eyes. "I get overcome when I think that there'll always be war, because it is so good as a spectator sport."

"What has that to do with you and me?"

"It has to do with all of us. Wars are profitable and exciting. So we'll always have them. Some get killed, but what of it? The show goes on. And it's a good show. Colossal."

"I don't like to see you bitter."

She shrugged.

He took up his hat. "Friday, then?"

She nodded. "Good night, Hal. Don't mind me."

He smiled at her in genuine affection as he went out.

Hank was more of a help to her. He understood her.

When she said to him, "The Allies seem not quite so full of brotherly love now," instead of assuring her that all was well, he agreed.

"Peace is near. They are beginning to jockey for position."

"So that's all the war was about."

"Not by any means. It kept the Gestapo away from us, and the things that happened at Lidice and Dachau. Don't forget that."

One day Julie came to the back of the shop for Kari. "A sailor wants to see you. The fair girl, he said."

Kari thought of Hiram. But it was not Hiram. It was the sailor who had bought the hydrangea for his mother.

They shook hands.

"I want to thank you, Miss, for taking that plant out to Mum. She was tickled."

"How is she?"

He grinned. "Glad to have me home. And with the war looking as if it would soon be over!"

"She will be happy then," agreed Kari softly.

"When I get out of the navy, I want to make things easier for her. As long as . . ." He paused and leaned closer. "Do you think there'll be a depression?"

"Surely not. Surely they can manage."

His jaw tightened. "The first thing I can remember is the depression. Relief. Not enough of anything. They'd better manage. We've been through a war, we young 'uns. We've learned to fight."

They stood looking at each other across the counter, she against a background of flowers, and lovely in herself, and he dark and thin and shabby. A spark clicked between them. They thought in the same language.

His face softened. "You've changed, Miss. Was the war bad for you?"

She nodded sombrely.



He put out his hand. "If I could do anything."

She smiled through sudden tears. "I'm glad you're all right."

She looked after him thoughtfully. He carried the marks of a poverty-stricken childhood. Diet deficiency showed in his bones. Never in all his life had he had much comfort, either at home or at sea. But he was sound, and he was tough. He was of her generation. He belonged with her.

She thought, "If there was anyone who would seem enough like Jeff for me to be with, it would be someone like that. Hard and tired and knowing the score."

That night she had another visitor.

A complete stranger, who began pleasantly, "You must forgive me for intruding." Then she saw the painting on the wall. "Why, there it is!" she exclaimed, and crossed the room to stare at it. After a minute she turned to Kari.

"I've been searching for it. He was a friend of mine."

"I can put you in touch with the owner."

Her guest sat where she could see the picture. She was a dark, good-looking woman in her thirties.

"I live in New Orleans now," she explained. "But I was born in a little Ontario village. He," she nodded, "was the minister. When I was eight years old, he was killed. I was playing on the roadway. A car came careening around the corner. He ran and threw me clear, but the car caught him."

Kari looked up into the ribald, ruddy face.

"A college friend of his painted that. It hung in his study in the parsonage. It was not the kind for the

church vestry, as you can see. After his death it disappeared. When I got older I wanted it, but no one knew where it was."

"You were fond of him?"

"Very fond. All the children were. He went fishing with us. But he was not a successful minister. He was a free-thinker. And he had a terrible sense of humour. He'd tell stories at the Board meetings, slapping his leg and roaring with laughter. The men laughed too, but when they went home and told their wives!"

She smiled ruefully up at the picture. "Well, he died. The way I told you. And now I've found him again."

"I think my predecessor got the picture in a second-hand store."

"Where he'd be quite at home," smiled the other.

When she was alone, Kari looked up at him. "So you were a fake," she said. "All that devilishness, and as soft as butter inside." But no, the devilishness was there. So was the goodness. They ran along, side by side.

April was nearly over. The lengthening days were warm with sun, and the air smelled of new grass and buds breaking. There was a more tremulous quality in this than in other Aprils. Peace was in the air. It could not now be long delayed.

Two young women met in Beatrice Blair's flower shop. They stopped to talk.

Said one, admiringly, "How well you convened the spring luncheon, my dear! It was charming."

"But I was terribly worried," murmured the other in a soft, pretty voice. "I was afraid that peace would be declared that day. I 'phoned my husband at the office in the morning to see what he thought. He was worried, too. You can say what you like, it wouldn't have done the luncheon any good."

Then Kari heard herself saying, interjecting herself into the conversation, in the same polite, well-modulated voice the other had used:

"For how many dead men would you settle, Madam? How many drowned sailors, or airmen blown to bits, or soldiers killed by a bayonet or a bomb? To make your luncheon a success?"

She smiled and said it. And waited.

The woman looked at her, then flushed furiously and walked out of the shop.

Kari went back to the glassed-in office. "I'm becoming a liability, Beatrice. You should fire me." And she told her.

"We'll take a chance," said Beatrice.

Chapter XX

TWO DAYS IN MAY

On May the seventh, early, Beatrice called Kari on the telephone.

"What are we going to do with ourselves, you and I? Today and tomorrow?"

"Hank is still in Quebec?"

"Till Wednesday."

Kari's voice was not quite steady. "I'm not going to join in the celebrations, if that's what you mean. I'm thankful for peace, but I'm not happy."

"I know. Let's get out of the city. There's the cottage on Memphramagog. We could pick up some food and have dinner out there, and stay the night."

That was what they did. After lunch, they drove slowly out of the city through wet streets that were now given over wholly to jubilation and were filled with laughing, shouting, yodelling crowds. They crossed the long bridge over the St. Lawrence, and sped south and east across flat, green country, drenched with rain.

The heavy, sluicing sound of it was externally soothing to Kari. That is, it rested her nerve-ends and

relaxed them. But within, there was a tension, a mounting tumult that she felt must be somehow soon resolved, if she was to live and think and act in an integrated and normal way. She began to feel an urgency about this flight through the rain, as if it were for her not so much an escape, as a desperate search for reality and a way of life.

They came presently into the rolling country around Knowlton. The grass in the pastures was wetly green. The willows were red with spring, and the hillside brooks were full of new life and came tumbling down over the stones exultantly. A rocky road across the shoulder of a mountain brought them to The Landing, where the lake lay spread out before them, a silvery sheet of water, patterned by the rain.

The stony pallor was going out of Beatrice's face. "I'm always excited when I get this close," she said.

They plunged again into the forest and drove beneath the interlacing smooth gray branches of the maples and the wet, green flanges of hemlocks. The rain diminished, then stopped. Through the trees they saw the lake again, and suddenly, there was the long red roof of the cottage.

They walked over a carpet of dead leaves, flattened by last winter's snows, and with new growth up-spearing through it. Beatrice turned the key in the door.

It was damp and cold within. But kindling and dry logs were in the wood-box, and soon a fire was leaping and snapping on the hearth. They brought food in from the car. They made tea and ate oatmeal cookies with it, and felt the comfort of food and fuel. Then

they set their bedding about the fire to air and warm, and went out on the porch.

"When I come for the first time each spring," said Beatrice, "I never feel that I am coming to an empty house. I feel rather as if I were interrupting another kind of living that has been going on in my absence, very active and enterprising."

"Do you mean the little beasts and birds?"

"Not quite. It is as if someone moved out just as we came in, and then stood by, watching."

"Friendly or unfriendly?"

"Neither. Indifferent."

"And as soon as we go?"

"They come back in with a sigh of relief."

Kari laughed.

The clouds had thinned out, and through a rift in them the pale, shining sky showed through. The watery sunshine gave the gray lake a moonstone glow. Trees crowded close about the porch. On the tip of a sapling, a small bird teetered, trilled, cocked his head to listen, took the run of melody again, and ended on a high, clear note. He flicked his tail in satisfaction.

"Eric loved this place," said Beatrice.

"I can imagine."

The sky darkened. Wind swept the lake suddenly. Rain came again in big, separate drops, then in a steady downpour.

Inside, Kari pulled a big chair close to the fire. Beatrice stretched out on the sofa, one knee over the other, one foot aswing. She wore a dark red sweater and navy slacks.

"She's fifty," thought Kari. "I wonder what it feels like."

The rain drummed smartly on the roof, and the window-panes were awash with it. It shut them in.

Beatrice's eyes were closed. The firelight gave her face a glow as of youth. She said, "I love the rain. It relaxes. It heals." And in the same breath, "Did you ever think of committing suicide?"

"Yes," said Kari shortly.

"So did I," went on Beatrice in a peaceful voice. "I don't think it's too terrible a thing to do under certain circumstances. Do you know what deterred me? I thought of meeting Alan or Eric. After. It seemed as if it might be a little awkward. As if I'd done something *gauche* like leaving a party by the back door, instead of saying good-bye and thank-you to my host. Then, that night, it rained. So soft. So gentle. Like time itself. There's something queer about time. It doesn't go. It stays. What has been, is. Do you know what I mean?"

"The past is safe."

"Yes. We have it. Alan and I together. Eric growing up. It has happened. It is. There now, I'm getting metaphysical and queer."

They were silent. The room was warm and still. Beatrice lay prone and peaceful in the firelight. Then Kari said in a level, unemotional voice:

"All over the world, people are so happy today they're going crazy. But some are like us. It seems ironical that it was once said 'Blessed are they that mourn.'"

Beatrice opened her eyes to look at her briefly, then closed them again. "Did it ever occur to you that

sorrow is the bottommost thing of all? In sorrow we touch reality."

Kari made an inarticulate sound.

"I know," said Beatrice. "Nevertheless in that way we who mourn are blessed. We are made to face the truth. Our illusions are shattered. Besides, we are forced by our pain to seek our real comfort. And when we have sought to the utmost limit of our resources, then we find."

She swung her long legs over and got up.

"I'm going to make us an elegant supper."

They ate on a table pulled up before the hearth. When they had cleared away the dishes, they made up the beds and then sat before the fire. There was a small gramophone. Beatrice put on the records. They were old ones, mostly, and diversified: "The Pilgrim's Chorus," Brahms, Gershwin, "There'll Always Be An England!" Beatrice sat with the tears running down her face.

"Don't mind me," she said. "Eric bought them."

The morning broke clear and fresh.

"Wind," said Kari, looking out over the lake. "I like it."

As she stood on the porch, it flattened her slacks against her thighs and tingled on her body through her thick, yellow sweater. The lake was a dark, electric blue and whitecaps raced across it. It was a boisterous day.

After breakfast they pulled the boat down to the water. Upshore, a rocky headland jutted out and in the lee of it a small, shingly beach curved like a

scimitar. It was quiet here, though the tops of the tall trees tossed and bent as the gale flowed over. The sound of the wind and waves without, gave the place a curious air of quiet expectancy.

Said Beatrice, "On the far side of the point there's another beach. The wind gets it in full force. I'm not sure that it's safe to go."

"I'll row."

"All right. You're stronger."

They pushed out into a gently rocking swell. A sharp line ran down the lake from the tip of the headland. Beyond it the water ran white.

Suddenly they were in it. The oars twisted in Kari's hands. Then she strengthened and stiffened herself, and the boat inched into the waves. The wind tore at them. The kerchief about Kari's head loosened, snapped off and whirled away. Her wild, pale hair streamed out and whipped about her. She was enveloped in sound, the deep, surging roar of the water and the scream of the wind as it shrilled and pinged on the sharp edges of the boat.

She rowed in long, steady strokes. She felt her strength come up from her feet. She felt it along her shins, and in the strong muscles of her thighs, in her slim loins, and in her braced back and her square shoulders. But it took all that strength. She looked at the rocky headland to her right, and it seemed as if she by enormous effort was only standing still while the waves ran past her.

They came up alongside, smooth and green, then suddenly swelling, rearing, and breaking in a welter

of white. The red boat shivered with the impact of them. Beatrice began to bail.

She screamed at Kari, "Have you ever rowed against such waves?"

Kari nodded. She had. On Last Mountain Lake. With Kirk. That had been a spring storm, too. And the waves that had come down that eighty miles of water had been as large as these. But there had been two pairs of oars then, and she and Kirk rowing strongly and precisely, in unison. Men had been on the wharf at Regina Beach ready to put out if they had been swamped. But they had not been swamped.

What if that should happen today? Would it matter much?

For a moment she wondered. Then flooding over her from her braced insteps up, came the fierce desire to live. Not just a hope or a resolve, but a fixed purpose. She bent to her oars. And all her strength of body and mind, of bones and tendons and muscles and will, co-ordinated and slipped into groove, and she felt she could go on forever. Her back ached and her arms were numb, and her hair stung her face as the wind whipped it, but that had nothing to do with her ability to keep on as long as was necessary.

"Are we going too far?" she called to Beatrice presently.

"No. A little farther. Then swing round and come in the easy way."

That was what they did. They came boisterously in on the big waves and shot far up the beach.

Leaping out, they pulled the boat well in, then climbed still farther themselves and sat down on a ledge

where a high, up-jutting rock sheltered them from the wind.

"I should have known better," said Beatrice. "We might never have made it."

Kari's breath was still coming fast and hurting her. She stretched out in the long niche made by the wall of rock. It was warm. The sun shone down from above, and the wind passed over.

"Rest," said Beatrice and laid her jacket over her. "There's a deserted cottage on the brow of the cliff. Eric and I used to plan to restore it. I'm going on up there."

Kari rested. The air was wonderful. It smelled of spruce-needles and new leaves and of the wind that had leaped from the tips of a thousand white-capped waves. It was loud with sound, yet the sounds rested her. The pines, breathing heavily, above, and below, the hammering of wave on rock, the long sucking withdrawal from rift and cavern, and the crashing roar again. It was a vast prodigious lullaby. She closed her eyes.

She thought of Kirk. She thought of him in tenderness and in grief. She thought, he should never have been asked to give up his life, neither he nor the others of his generation. But he did give it, freely and cheerfully, and with the grace and gallantry of his youth. And that giving was like a fresh wind blowing through the dusty wastes of avarice and inertia that had made the war. He belonged now to an elect company. And Jeff? Oh, Jeff, darling, is there now no hope at all for you?

She wept a little. Then, cradled in the sound of the

wind, she slept. Or she thought she slept. Anyway, she was awakened.

It was as if a hand had been laid on her shoulder. But there was no hand. Or a voice spoke in her ear. But there was no voice. Yet there was something. A stillness, a clarity, an ecstasy, as if she were suddenly overcome by the beauty and preciousness of something. Was this something always here, permeating our three-dimensional life like an all-inclusive dimension, but only once in a while finding the senses sufficiently heightened and strengthened to perceive it? And what was this sense of love and strength and homecoming, shot through with a strange exhilaration, what was it but the presence of God?

That was what religious people meant, but could never quite explain to anyone else. Because there are no words really for it. So they invented queer, awkward phrases, and out of their efforts to say the unsayable, schisms and misunderstandings rose. While really, basically, a church is just a group of people who know.

She sighed deeply. The stillness, the presence was gone. But never quite gone, forever. Always it would be there. And once in a while she would be relaxed enough, emptied of herself enough, sensitive enough to make connection.

She got to her feet and climbed to the top of the crag, and there was the deserted cottage, and Beatrice sitting on the steps.

"A view, isn't it?"

To the south the mountain, called Owl's Head, was grape-blue against the powder-blue of the sky, and across the lake the hills were green with trees, and a

white village sprawled at the edge of the tossing, bright blue water.

"It's beautiful." Kari's voice vibrated queerly. Beatrice looked at her.

Kari took a long breath. "Did you ever have a feeling that a window swung open suddenly, and you saw for a moment another and more real world shining through this one?"

Beatrice nodded. "Reconciliation with God. Coming home briefly and breathing the air of love."

Kari made no answer. She was quiet as they rowed back to the cottage, and as they made and ate their lunch, and drove back to town. She kept thinking, did anything really happen on the rock this morning? And swift and sure, the answer came. It did, it did happen. Then why not accept it? She was sure at the time. She was still sure.

When they came into the city, Beatrice said, "Stay here tonight. This empty place!"

So Kari stayed. She slept in the room that had been Eric's, and was now Hank's.

She lay awake for a while thinking. She felt that this day she had come to know something that Jeff had been aware of, all along. She went over in her mind, page by page, that last letter of his. What had he been trying to tell her?

That he loved her; that this world as perceived by our senses is not all; that the great thing he fought for was the brotherhood of man, and a new way of living in which peace would be possible. What did he want her to do?

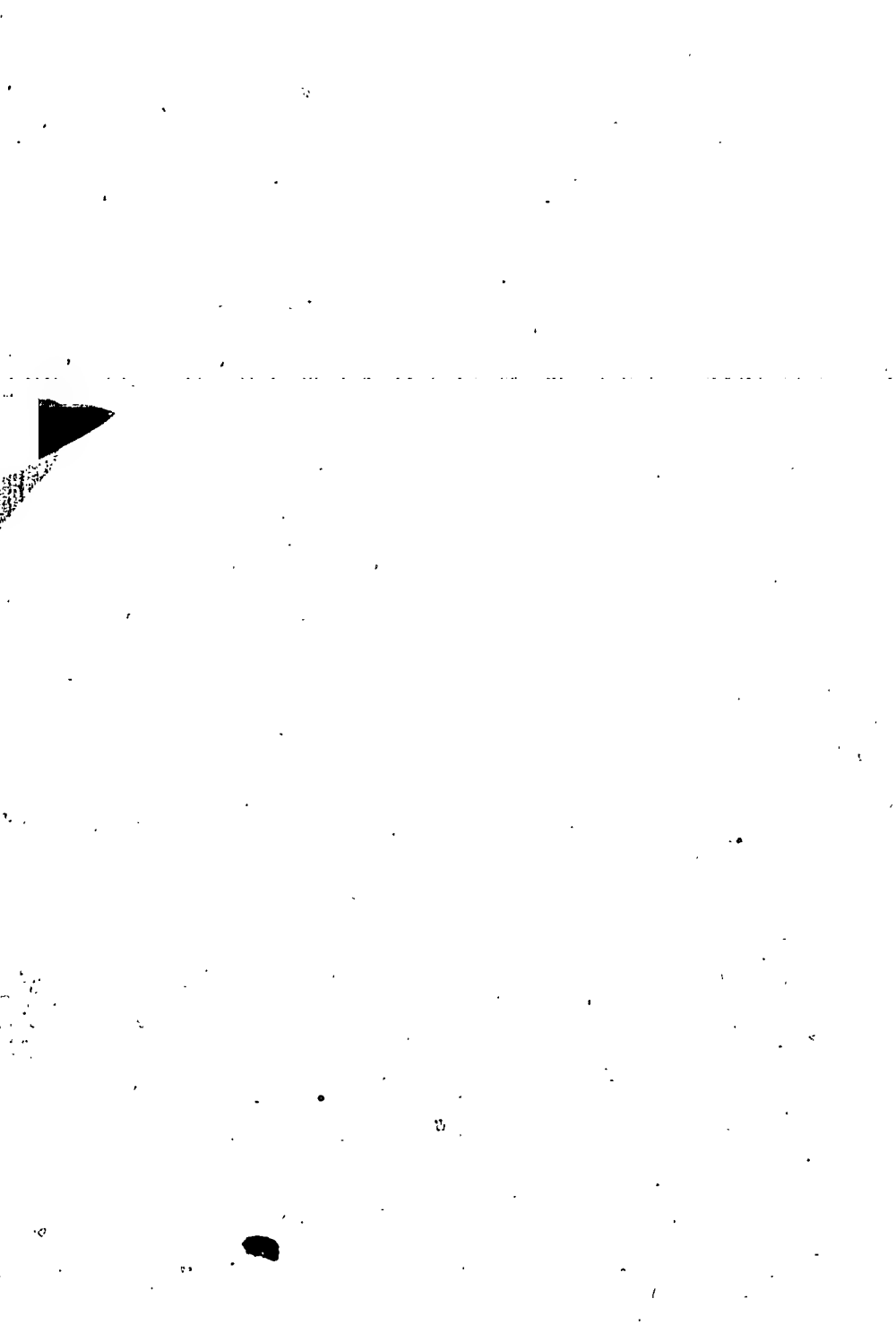
Why, to take over, for him. To implement his sacrifice, to see that it was made effectual. That is what is laid on all of us by those who take their rest in far places.

The jagged pieces of the puzzle came into pattern. She looked calmly now and without rancour at the fact of unequal sacrifice, and evasion of responsibility, and self-seeking in high and in low places. It was the way of a world that was as yet imperfect. But her own life had aim and direction.

Not only that, but there was available, she now knew, a secret source of power and comfort to care for whatever trouble might yet come to her, as well as what was already allotted.

She turned on her side and slept.





Chapter XXI

TRIAL BY FIRE

DURING the long hours of the same night, Jonathan Osburn lay wakeful in his big room on the ground floor of the house on Pine Avenue. The place was in darkness except for the dim flange of light that slanted in from the door of the adjoining room, where his nurse was sleeping noisily.

"Lazy slut," he thought, and his hand fumbled for the bell cord. Then he stopped. While she slept, he was free from the tyranny of her ministrations. And tonight, amazingly, he was free from that other tyranny of pain, the misery that had been for weeks racking him. He had a feeling of respite, of mild adventure. How could he use this reprieve? In what diversion, what delectation all his own?

He lay and considered. In the jubilation of the day just past, he had been neglected. His meals had been late and hastily prepared. He still enjoyed his food, if it was good enough to tempt his weakened appetite. If it wasn't, he sent back for something better. But

today, when he had left his tray untouched, nothing else had been forthcoming.

As he lay and thought about that, his irritation grew. He scowled into the darkness. His finger sought the bell again, but he refrained. He hated the sight of the woman. Fat, forty, with indeterminate features and mousy hair. Good-natured. If there was anything he hated, it was a good-natured woman. He liked fire in them. Always had.

He lay, remembering. And as he remembered, he gave a ghostly echo of his old cackling laugh.

The bed-springs creaked in the adjoining room. He was still.

Yes, he liked fire in them. He liked that yellow-haired girl on the top floor. He disliked her, too. There was ill will between them. That was what gave tang to life—to like and hate the same person at the same time. Now, as for Martha, his daughter, he was indifferent to her. She was negligible. Then he remembered his wife. She had not been negligible.

For a while he lay still, thinking uneasily of his wife. There was something there, deep in his consciousness and for long overlaid and to be cautiously skirted. A memory of areas of clarity and good will in his life, and of honest emotion, that had been gradually, and now almost entirely, obscured by the natural animosity and petty meanness of his mind. His wife had been a tall, fair-haired, fearless person. She had stood up to him. But she had not lived.

She had been a little like that girl on the top floor. Kari. Suddenly he remembered the black kitten of hers, he had killed. He couldn't help that. He feared

and hated cats. Had, ever since he had been a child, when a cat had clawed him.

He had been snipping at her whiskers with his mother's embroidery scissors. He had not hurt her, till she had hurt him. Then there had come on him for the first time that dark delight in pain, that secret pleasure that came from inflicting it. Whereupon the cat struck again, like lightning. One of her claws had caught him frighteningly in the eye. So he had loathed and feared cats ever since.

Yet they fascinated him. Their smoothness of movement, their green dilating eyes, their knowingness. They had none of the worshipful attitude of dogs. They did not idealize humans. They were realists. And one never really owned them. Yes, he disliked them.

Further sounds came from the nurse's room. She snored. She made snuffling noises. She repelled him. A member of the white race, he thought, middle-aged, flabby, female, was no match for the middle-aged lioness, or even the middle-aged black woman.

Then he remembered Amaryllis. Now, her he hated. Unequivocally. She had humiliated him. She had flung him over her black knee and had taken the flat of her hand to him. His white flesh crawled with the ignominy of it. And what could he do about it, bedridden and helpless, and she safe and secure, bedded down, wherever it was she slept, and with whom?

He beat his clenched fists in impotence. His face twisted. Then it settled into furtive lines of thought. Down in that small basement room were her belongings, her trinkets, her treasures, her bright-coloured

clothes. The old familiar excitement flowed through him, tingling in his veins. The old, strong wine of power. Power to harm.

He had no pain now. But he was weak. He slipped his leg out from the covers and looked at it. Mostly bone, and shrivelled hide and stringy tendons, indecently exposed. He flexed his weak muscles. He sat up. There was a certain strength in him.

He swung his legs out and put his weight on them. They wavered, but he held to the bed's edge, and gradually they stiffened as the blood flowed through them. He got as far as a chair and sat there for a while. This was fine. They all thought he was done for. Blast them! He got up again. Tremblingly he gained the doorway.

The hall light burned. The clock showed three. There was no sound at all. Before him was the stair to the basement. He held tight to the rail. Down, down, one step at a time, his feet fumbling. At the foot of the stair was a little shelf. On it were candles and a box of matches, a provision for such time the city lights failed. He scooped up a handful of matches and a stub of red candle.

The door to Amaryllis' small room was ajar. There was her box. In her haste to be away she had left the lid half off. He pulled out a pink patterned apron, a red silk kerchief, a woollen skirt that had once been Martha's. There was a box of jewellery too, ear-rings, and big, gaudy brooches and clips.

He looked around the room. Her cleaning basket stood near. Gingerly he picked out of it some pieces of cloth thick with hardened floor wax. He made a

nest of the clothes in the box, put in the waxy rags, set the candle in the middle and around it a sunburst of matches. Then he lighted the candle and half-closed the box for better draught.

As he climbed the stair, his legs kept buckling under him, but he felt good within. He felt the satisfaction of a deed well done. He climbed into bed and pulled up the covers. His heart was beating right up into his throat now, and he began to feel twinges as if the pain were coming back.

The nurse stirred. "You all right, Mr. Osburn?" she called sleepily.

He answered irascibly, "Why not?" and heard her good-natured laughter. Then weakness came over him in waves. He drowned in it. He slept.

After a while he wakened. It was morning. A pearly, diffused light came in at the windows. The shadows of the Venetian blinds lay in bars across the room.

He felt queer, empty, uncomplicated. He felt young and old at the same time. He felt an enormous understanding. He saw himself separate from the life he had led. He saw his real self, and he saw what he had done with that self. He remembered words he had spoken, letters he had written, deeds he had done.

Violently he repudiated it all. That was not the real man. The real man had been overlaid and hidden by this long insanity of evil, from which he had now emerged. An immense clarity came down upon him. "I have been out of my mind," he said in his heart, and he knew that he had come at last to himself.

Now, when it was too late. Or, was it? It was not too late, perhaps, to save the belongings of the black

girl, Amaryllis. He tried to rise. He could move neither hand nor foot. Nor even turn his head. He could only move his eyes. He was paralyzed. He could hear. And he could think. His mind was clear. But for everything else, it was too late.

He could hear. He could hear various rustlings and cracklings. The walls seemed full of peculiar small sounds. He could smell smoke. Panic seized him, but he had no voice for it. Only his eyes turned desperately from one side to the other.

There came a high-pitched scream from down the hall. The nurse sprang from her bed. She ran past him and opened the door. A ruddy light was reflected from the painted panels of it. She too screamed. Then she rushed to him and clutched him. She shouted at him and shook him. His old heart laboured, skipped a beat, pounded, then slowed down. It fluttered for a moment like a bird held in the hand, then it slowly stilled. The nurse caught at his wrist, her fingers seeking, but not finding a pulse.

She ran out into the hall. And met Martha.

"The shock," she explained, sobbing.

The firemen were there immediately. Sirens shrilled as the long, red trucks hurtled through the quiet streets. With smooth, swift co-ordination, ladders were hooked up and swung shakily in towards the high windows. Smoke belched blackly and the red flames licked. From all quarters, long, hard jets of water were played on the blaze. Quenched, it leaped out again, as from some hidden, vehement source.

Beatrice and Kari heard about the fire when the

early news came over the air. When they arrived, it was clear that the house was doomed.

"Did everyone get out?" they kept asking. No one knew.

The street was black with people now, a cordon of police holding them back. An ambulance pulled up. A stretcher, covered with a blanket, was lifted from the sidewalk and taken in charge by a white-clad attendant. The crowd opened and the ambulance sped away.

"Look out! The wall's going!" shouted someone.

It was the wall with the bay. It bulged queerly. It began to disintegrate around the window-frames. With a curious deliberateness, the bricks and mortar slowly gave away. Then came a great roar, and a flurry of smoke and flame and crashing masonry, and the green lawn was full of debris. Of twisted girders and what had been beds and bath-tubs.

"We might as well go," said Kari weakly.

But a policeman blocked their way. He had a soldier firmly by the arm.

"Dan!" screamed Kari. "Dan Laurell!"

Dan stood staring. Then his face broke, distorted wildly, sobered. "I was afraid you were in there," he said deeply.

The policeman spoke up. He was a dark, debonair Frenchman. "He runs right past the barrier. I had to take him in custody." Then he smiled and saluted and left them.

"Come home with us, Dan," said Beatrice. "We can do nothing here."

They were again interrupted. It was Hal this time. He came striding through the crowd and caught Kari

by the two hands. "Thank God you're safe. When I heard where the fire was!" There were tears in his eyes. "Where were you yesterday and the day before?"

"With Beatrice. Hal, this is Dan Laurel."

Hal was cordial, but a little questioning, and it was in his eyes that Kari knew the strangest people. Dan saluted gravely.

"We were just going home," said Beatrice.

"I'll drive you, and invite myself in."

"Good. Have breakfast with us."

As they let themselves into Beatrice's apartment, she said, "Hank will be here soon. His train is due."

Hal was full of information about the catastrophe. He had in a few minutes gathered all the salient facts. Three people had been sent to the hospital with minor injuries. One man was dead, but his nurse said that he had died of heart-failure at the first alarm. Everyone else had got safely out. The fire department had been admirable. So had the police. A credit to the city. Of course, the house was a total loss. Doubtless there was insurance.

Kari felt queer. All her belongings gone. Jeff's letters, too. That gave her a pang. And where would she now live?

Hank came in while they sat at breakfast, and they went over it all again. Hank was shaken. He kept looking at Kari.

"It's a miracle that you weren't there. And on the third floor!"

She smiled. "They all got out."

Dan was very quiet. His sombre eyes played over

Hank and Hal alternately, and his face was heavy with thought.

Kari said to him, "When did you get into the city?"
"A few days ago."

"Dan, were you wounded?" He was thinner.

He nodded. "In Holland. Then I had pneumonia. I'm going to be discharged."

She looked at him in dismay.

"But I'll be fine once I get back to the prairies."

"Why didn't you come to see me sooner?"

He glanced at Hal. "You were out," he said.

Beatrice broke in. "Hank, if you don't have to go to work till noon, will you take some things down to the shop for me, and tell Julie and Ben that we'll be along later?"

"I'll drive you." Hal got to his feet, too.

"Thanks," said Hank.

Both men turned to look at Kari when they reached the door, and there was in their faces the same cherishing look, as if something dear to them had been in jeopardy and was now safe.

Dan stared stonily at each in turn. Then he rose.
"I guess I'll be pushing along, too."

"Sit down," said Kari peremptorily.

Beatrice laughed. "I'll leave you," she said, and she went through the swinging door to the kitchen.

For a moment the two looked at each other in rancour, then abruptly they were back on the old friendly basis.

"Thank you for wanting to rescue me, Dan. It's a habit with you."

They smiled, remembering. Then he nodded his

head towards the door. "Those two, are they in love with you?"

Kari looked silently at him for a moment. Then, "Maybe," she said.

"And you?"

She shook her head. "There's Jeff."

He drew a long sighing breath. Then he smiled at her, the widest, crookedest, most emotional smile she had ever had from him. "Yes, there's Jeff," he said.

So he told her, starting at the beginning, the story of Edouard Desautels.

As he went on, she grew very still. Her face whitened and her eyes were enormous.

From the kitchen, Beatrice could hear Dan's deep, soft Indian voice going on and on in a monologue, and no word from Kari. Curiously, she looked in. When she saw Kari's face, she came swiftly over.

Kari reached and took her hand and held it. "Edouard Desautels," she said wonderingly. "That's Jeff."

Hank and Hal came back, and in a few sentences Beatrice gave them the story. Hank's face paled slowly, then he limped over and laid his hand affectionately on Kari's shoulder.

Hal was inclined to doubt the tale. He was flushed and truculent. Then, convinced, he demanded, "In what condition is Gilbride?"

Dan's steady black eyes had a red glimmer in them. "He has lost the sight of an eye. And an arm."

"Physically, what shape is he in?"

"What's it matter?" broke in Kari. "He's Jeff."

Tears slipped down her cheeks. Hank thought he had never seen such naked joy in anyone's face. He wanted to put up a shield to screen her. She rose and sat on the sofa beside Dan, rubbed her cheek against his rough khaki shoulder, and then sat still.

She was taut with happiness. Her blue, black-lashed eyes were wide and shining, her flushed face was wet with tears. Her whole body seemed so charged with joy that she was like a lighted lamp. Luminous.

Hal looked at her and sighed heavily. "I suppose you'll want to go over."

"Just as soon as I can get there."

"Well, my dear, that's a mistake. Why not wait here for Jeff? For years to come, England's going to be hungry. They've exhausted themselves economically. The discomforts over there . . ."

She looked kindly at him.

"All right, all right," he went on morosely. "I'll do what I can for you. You'll have to put your name down for transportation as an R.A.F. wife."

She nodded.

"Sometimes there's a long wait."

"I know. Then, when the word comes, only a few days to pack. I'll get ready right away." She broke into a peal of laughter. "I forgot. I've nothing to pack."

"Sometimes a vacancy crops up. I know a man in that department. You might get slipped in, if someone else drops out. That is, if you're set on it."

"I am. Believe me, I am."

"Very well, then." He looked at her in undeniable affection. "You must forgive me, my dear," he said, and took the hurdle of his disappointment. "I was being a poor loser. But you can count on me. I'll do my best for you, and for Jeff."

He smiled at them all. He was himself again.

Chapter XXII

OUTWARD BOUND

KARI lived the next few weeks in a haze of happiness. She was so happy she seemed no longer to be a separate entity. She was one with the world around her. She sat in a crowded bus, and looked into the tired faces of her fellow-travellers, and was passionately concerned for them, and full of love and sympathy. The very surfaces and textures about her, wood and stone and glass, seemed charged with a life of their own, and so, were precious.

Her happiness flowed out from her and enveloped those about her. In the florist's shop the air seemed quick with new life now, with laughter and elation. Beatrice and Julie, even Ben, felt it. With Beatrice, at first, Kari tried to quench her high spirits, remembering that for her had come no belated good news. But there was no need. Beatrice was sincerely glad for her, and made it plain.

Cables had been sent at once to Edouard Desautels—how strange the name—and to Cicely in London. A jubilant letter had come back from Cicely, telling Kari

that Halfrid was in Belgium and would search Jeffrey out at once.

"Oh, Halfrid," thought Kari, laughing tearfully, "thank you extremely."

She waited longer for word from Jeff. She was a little fearful. There were difficulties in the way. His pretended amnesia and his long silence had to be explained to the authorities. His Belgian foster-mother would stop at nothing to keep him with her. All these things had to be resolved.

Then came a cable. Brief, but satisfying. "In England now. Can you come? Love, Jeff."

Jeff. Not Edouard, Jeff. Could she come!

But she had to wait. She should be used to waiting. And this waiting was different. When Jeff had been missing, with every passing day she had slipped a little further down the dark incline to despair. Now, the slant was upward, to life and love renewed. She thanked God every morning for that.

She was living now with Beatrice. Hank had got himself temporary quarters, and gave up his room to her. Hank was good, she told herself. He was, in fact, one of the best persons she had ever known. He had lifted his own disappointment into concern and care for her. She felt a rush of affection for him. Ever since she had known him, he had been looking after her. He had tried to direct her life, to protect and steady her. And he had done that. She owed a great deal to him.

She told him so, one day as they drove along the road that edged the south shore of the river.

Hank nodded. "I tried to arrange your life for you,

and it back-fired on me." He smiled reassuringly at her. "It's all right, Kari. I'll love you at long distance."

The car slid to a stop. He reached into the locker for the field-glasses. "It may be a long time before you see this shoreline again. As for me, I think I'll remember you most clearly as you were here one day last summer."

The glasses brought the rapids up close. The big, upcurling, green waves crashed in a welter of white, and filled the world with sound. The roar of it was exhilarating. It was jocund and joyous and strong. Beyond lay the city. And beyond that, the mountain. The tall buildings, the spires, the domes, the pillared marts were all bathed in white sunshine and a look of innocence, unwarranted but enchanting.

They watched in silence for a while, then Hank said, "Now I'm stepping right back into character. What's ahead for you, when Jeff and you are together again?"

"Why, just Jeff. That's all I'm sure of. I don't even know where we'll be living. It all depends on him."

"What's going to be your main concern once he is well again and your life established?"

"Isn't that enough?"

He shook his head. "Not for you. The last five years have ploughed too deep. Something should come of it."

She was thoughtful. She realized that what she had learned in adversity, she was now in her happiness liable to forget. She said slowly, "Jeff wrote me a letter just before he went missing, and it was later sent on. He thought that those of our generation, those who are left, have a special responsibility in the effort towards peace."

Her face was all at once bleak with remembered pain. "As long as I live, I can never get away from the misery of war. Kirk, Eric, all the others, dying young and dying hard. I can't bear it. I'd do anything to help stop another war before it gets going."

His eyes rested on her in affection. "My Kari with the pale gold hair," he said.

She smiled at him. "I wish you'd known Jeff. Some day you will, perhaps."

Jeff was never far from her thoughts. She tried to visualize the change in him. She conjured up his face and mentally laid over one side of it a livid scar. She clasped her right hand on her left arm at the elbow. Gone from there.

"I don't care," she whispered passionately to herself. "What does it matter?"

Then one day at the shop she was called to the telephone. Important, someone had said.

Julie looked after her. "Mother of God," she murmured. "Let this not be bad news."

It was not. It was that an air force wife was not able to pick up her transportation to England, and Kari might have her place. Kari's face was shining as she came out of the office.

She had eight hours. But she was practically packed already. Julie saw to some last-minute purchases. It was a breathless time.

She called her father and mother by telephone. Their voices came clearly into the room. Not only their voices, but their affection and their blessing. It strengthened her.

Beatrice helped her at every turn. So did Hank and Hal. But it was Beatrice whose presence and support was so warm and cherishing and solicitous during these hours, that Kari was moved by it.

She thought, "She has given me everything. She has given me the knowledgeable sympathy of experience, the only kind that counts. And for her, there is no reprieve."

Aloud she said, "I don't know how I am going to get along without you." Then added slowly, "I wish I could have been of some use to you."

"You have." Beatrice kissed her quickly. "You have been my daughter."

The day before she sailed, a letter came from Cicely. She wrote in part:

"We can't wait to see you. Jeff is either in a fever of expectancy or in a cold sweat because of his scarred face. He carries over a bit of a neurosis about that, I am afraid, and the doctor tells me that for some years he may suffer from fits of depression. He recommends a healthy outdoor life. Where, it will be for you and him to decide."

Three days later, Kari re-read and pondered that letter of Cicely's. She was now at sea. There was a fresh wind blowing, and she sat by herself and looked out over the water. And the tumultuous thoughts that filled her mind were as restless and buoyant as the green waves that lifted the ship in a long, swelling rhythm.

She thought of Jeff as Cicely had described him,

anxious and troubled about his scarred face, and her heart turned over in love and sympathy. Then she projected her mind into the future, and she saw him and Cicely on the dock to meet her.

That moment of meeting—that was what he was dreading. When her eyes fell first on his face. But she knew how it would be, how it had to be. She would give him all of herself in that first long look. She would avoid nothing. She would see all, and accept all, and there would be no pity in her, but a great, blazing pride. And he would take fire from her, and in his own mind he would be a whole man again. That was the way it would be.

She struck the tears from her eyes and thought, "Never again will we be apart. Not for even a day."

Then she sighed deeply and leaned back and said to herself as she had so often said of late, "How thankful I should be. And I am."

The wind pressed firmly against her. It had substance here on the open sea. It was like a prairie wind: Cold and fresh, as if it had come sweeping across the valley of the Qu'Appelle, sharp with the breath of a thousand miles of snow. In fact the sea was like the prairie. Wind and a far view.

The thought pleased her. And the large, soft sound of the waves enfolded her. She was cradled in it. It was like a lullaby. Her eyelids drooped. Her body went limp and soft with relaxation. Her mind forsook the present. Before her lay the wide prairie, and the Qu'Appelle crossing it; not as it would be now, but on a day of wind and snow and at the time of the setting of the sun.

There were the familiar massy banks, and there the bare trees, scrub oak and birch and wild cherry, in delicate tracery against snow and sky. And the sky was a great moving sea of colour, amethyst and amber, pale rose, paler gold, and a clear, cold green, all forming and re-forming in swathes and swirls of colour under the high upper currents of the air.

While all about, the white snow drifted and sifted off from the tops of the ridges, or curled over in a lip like the frozen edge of a wave. The low shrubs were hidden by it, but here and there a taller rose bush, bright with haws, strained the wind through thorny branches.

And there on the little plateau among the birches, she and Jeff reined in their piebald ponies and sat looking quietly out over the wide stretches of the valley. From time to time they talked of Kirk, gently and lovingly, as if he were not far away. To their right, past the stone gates, past the snowy expanse of lawn and garden, and sheltered by trees, was their home, was Carrickfergus, its windows on fire from the setting sun, and the smoke from its chimneys going straight up into the bright sky.

From that sky came a sound, and a plane passed over, and then another, the light glinting on the wings and the engines drumming softly. They watched them pushing out into infinity, brave but diminishing, till they were swallowed up and dissolved in space. Then Jeff turned and smiled at Kari, that twisted, sweet smile that belonged to him alone in all the world. And they rode along the ledge of the valley towards the house among the trees.

Kari blinked and came awake. The saffron light of a sunset at sea was shining into her eyes and flooding the watery world around her.

"But that, too, is how it will be," she said to herself. "I know it. A healthy outdoor life, the doctor said, Jeff will come back with me, and if he likes it, we will stay in the valley."

As long as they were together! Her whole being rushed out to the time when she would, in reality, see and hear and touch him. To the long years to come. To a future that would not be easy, perhaps, but good. She was ready for that future. Ready and eager.

She came and stood by the rail and looked out at the churning wake, at the bright clouds piling high, and the running, gold-flecked waves.

She felt more alive than she could ever remember. She felt integrated, whole, full of strength and vigour. She felt a deep spring of love and trust within her. The thought of Jeff was warm in her heart.

Not only was the thought of Jeff there, but she had a sudden, overwhelming sense of oneness with those of her own generation over all the world. With Julie and Gus, with Halfrid and Cicely, Maisie and Hiram and Dan, and all the others. They were bound together by experience, and there is no substitute for experience.

They were bound together in another way. By the awareness they had of, and the love they bore to, those friends of theirs whose bodies had been destroyed by war, but who were now an encompassing, great cloud of witnesses whom they could never quite ignore. Much had been asked of their generation. More would

yet be asked of those who were left. But what could they not do, so greatly companioned? R

Kari stood, still and tense with thought. She felt the steady throb of the ship's engines beneath her, bearing her eastward over the ocean. The gulls wheeled whitely against the dark sea and the golden sky. The waves rushed past. The wind was shrill in the rigging. Her heart lifted buoyantly to it. She was outward bound.

